

ANNA KRASNOPERKO

LETTERS FROM MY MEMORY

The Real Story

Translated from Byelorussian
by Eleonora Golbert

INTRODUCTION

For a long time I would escape from you, my memory. For more than 40 years. But you took over. You made me resurrect the past. You also took revenge for my betrayal by not keeping everything alive. That is why I had to change some names in my story...

... This book is about what we lived through in the Minsk ghetto. In it I also used the notes of the former ghetto prisoners, my friends doctor Berta Moyseeyvna Bruk and her seventeen-year old daughter Lyalya. Later both of them became partisans.

Their words written by ink and pencil have faded. But every line hurts and bleeds. Let those lines merge with my memory.

The Key from Ashes

On July 1st, 1941 we are coming back to Minsk. It is ruined, burnt down, and devastated. We roam the city in search of acquaintances, and we are looking for food. We managed to obtain syrup from the confectionery factory "Kommunarka". People try to hoard buckets of the sweet food before the Germans will notice this.

We do not have a bucket. Inna and I are carrying syrup in jars. We are happy to have procured at least something for our Granny to subsist on. Where is mother? Two weeks ago she went on a business trip. Where is father who went to the front? Where are we going to sleep today?

We went again to see the ashes that were once our home. I cannot bring myself to throw out the key from our apartment, the key I do not need any more. My father's words sound again and again in my ears.

- Here, kids, is the key. I am leaving for the front.

- Do you have summons from the Military Committee?

- No, not yet, but I have to go...

He kissed us and left...

What happened next is horrible to remember. Fire, bombardment, the debris-full gas shelter. Miraculously, granny, Innochka and I managed to get out. Our neighbor, from the Byelorussian Radio Committee, helped us to get from the burning city to the Mogilyov highway.

- Go to the East, -- he suggested, and I am leaving with the Red Army.

Hungry and hopeless, we are in the column of refugees. Grandmother cannot walk any more, her heart is too weak. Inna and I are trying to hold her. The column of people stretched along the highway. Sore feet, eyes that cannot cry any more, wailing children...

And that endless bombardment. Gunfire from the planes.

At last we reached Dukora. Grandmother is not able to walk any more. Totally exhausted we fall down on a stack of hay. We can hardly recover our breath when bombing starts again. No break!

And then we hear roaring motorcycles, shouting, foreign language.

German motorcyclists are in Dukora. Has Minsk been invaded?!

We are pushed out from the barn into the street. We see the crowds of people there, those who survived air raids. The Germans push us to some store. They are bringing out various goods, are tossing them in front of us, forcing them into our hands. We begin to realize what is going on - we are being filmed.

After that they are seizing people.

- Kommunisten! Yuden!

... Bleeding earth of Dukora...

... Terrible, exhausting way back, to Minsk. What is awaiting us? We know that our home has been burnt down. Only the key is left. And we fully realize that being "Juden" is an affliction. We

are thinking about mother. Maybe she has already returned from Volkovisk? Maybe, she is looking for us?

... At last we are in Minsk. There is no mother and father. I am responsible for grandmother and for little sister..

Looking for some roof over our heads.

Death for Non-compliance

Unfortunately, the rumors are true. In the suburbs of Minsk, in the village of Drozdi, the Germans formed a concentration camp. In it there are prisoners of war and civilians, who were captured in the city. The Germans are looking for commanders and commissars of the Red Army among them, as well as for communists and Jews. All of them have to be executed.

The announcements are posted everywhere: men, age 15 to 45, have to check in at the commandant's office. For non-compliance -- death. The columns of prisoners of war are moving along the streets. The Germans kill everybody who is not able to go.

Once Inna and I once saw how along the Sovetskaya street near the Bolshoi Boulevard the column of prisoners was moving, and one of them, young and tall, with the bandaged head, started to sing: "There are clouds over the city. The thunderstorm is near..."*

The song caught on. The familiar tune was in the air.

What happened! Fire, yelling! The dead on the cobble road. They are innumerable!

For non-compliance -- death!

Plague

I recall the expression that was used before the war: "brown plague". In Germany fascist thugs wear brown shirts. Here they wear gray, green, and black colors. Particularly scary are those who wear dark-gray-green uniform with black collar, on which there are two lightning-like zigzags and letters "SS" in silver square. They have silver wicker shoulder straps and eagle on the sleeves. On the buckle there are words: "Gott mit uns".** These are soldiers of the SS. Their festive uniform is black, collars and cuffs are with silver edging. And that macabre logo - cranium and bones.

The gendarmerie uniform is light-gray-green. On the chest they wear chains with half-moon-shaped badges.

There might be here soldiers and officers from other military units. We do not recognize them. Just overwhelming aversion and hatred to this uniform. Gray-green-black plague.

*Russian revolutionary song

** God is with us

The Order to Form the Ghetto.

We try to kill hunger with sunflower-seeds. And a lot of others do the same. After sunflower-seeds had been found in some warehouse everybody rushed there. Tata Drozdova, my friend who lives in the Zamkavaya street shared them with me. We keep looking around for a place to shelter us.

We sleep in debris. Wash ourselves in Svisloch. Because of dirt and misery we have lice. We are afraid of them just as much as we are afraid of hunger.

Soon it will be forbidden to be in the city. It is rumored Jews will be all settled in a separate zone...

Near Yubileynaya Square we stop at the old poster. This part of the city has not been burnt down, and the posters remained intact. One poster announces that in the Byelorussian theater there is the play "The Last". Artistic Director is Mikhail Zorev.

I used to go to this theater with my friend Nila Kuntsevich nearly every week. Her cousin worked there as a scene designer. Black hair, very dynamic, he looked like an actor. Light gait, resolute voice, intent eyes. Where is he now? Probably, went to the front like our father...

Nila had remarkably fresh complexion and gentle eyes, like her brother's. Where is Nila? Where is Zorev? I wonder if he is Jewish or Slavic? Nobody thought about such things before the war. We all lived together beautifully.

There is a notice near the poster. Its meaning is horrifying, just as its every brutal word. Inna is pulling me to go. But I cannot avert my eyes, and read loudly that all citizens of Jewish origin have to check in at the "Judenrat" and live in the closed-off area, i.e. in the ghetto.

The announcement is big, and its every point is scary.

"Jids", "ghetto" - the words sting, they hurt you like a slap in the face.

- What does it mean "jids" - asks Inna.

Tears shadow my eyes, the bitterness of the words chokes me.

- This is a wicked, humiliating word. Those who say them will be sued and penalized.

- Will Germans be sued? - my sister asks.

- Certainly.

... On the nearest house we see the notice again:

"Jids and communists must..."

Sister

That we are still dragging our feet is a wonder. While grandmother is staying in the agreed-upon place in the wreckage, we keep wandering about the city. We look for our mother, try to find some food. We hang in the Podgorni Lane where we used to live before the war, go along the Savetskaya street, near the Bolshoi

We see a German throwing bread to the dog. The dog did not eat it. We were not quick enough to snatch it. Some other girl did.

We see a lot of people in the distance moving along the Sovetskaya street. More prisoners of war... As the column is approaching we see a girl rushing to the German guard.

- Lieber Herr, --she is pointing out to one of the prisoners. - Das ist mein Bruder*... -- She is trying to give him some paper, probably, a document.

Amazingly, the German shoves the prisoner from the column. The girl pulls him into the debris of the former movie house "Chirvonaya Zorka".

- She is wonderful, this girl! -- says an old man. It is not the first time that she saves people.

Mother Has Come

It is a miracle! Mother has come. She noticed us in the street near the place where our house once was. She was going from Volkovisk, with a wounded leg... That's unbelievable!.. How strong-willed and brave she is! And we immediately feel relieved.

We tell her about father leaving for to the front, about the neighbor helping me, Inna and grandmother get to the highway, about Germans catching up with us in Dukora -- tell about everything we have been through.

Mother suggests that we go to the Zamkavaya street to her acquaintance Iosiph Semyonovich. We said we had already been to him. His family, might have evacuated, but his apartment is intact. Can we seek shelter there? If not in his apartment, maybe in some other?

...Zamkavaya street is in the ghetto area...

Parting with Tata

Non-Jewish residents who had lived within the ghetto boundaries, have to move to other parts of the city. My friend Tata - Tanechka Drozdova, who lives in the Zamkavaya street, moves somewhere to the Grushevka boro. Their family did not manage to evacuate in time.

We are sitting at the bottom of the stone stairs. Very soon Tata will leave. Are we ever going to meet again?

White straight hair frame her round sad face. Full of hatred, she tells me about the boy who is known to work for the Germans.

We remember our mutual friends.

Then I tell her about the prisoner of who sang "There are clouds over the city..."

-- I will be coming here, -- says Tata. -- Though father said we would not stay long in the city, we'll move somewhere to the country.

We are saying good-bye to each other. Tata is looking around everything we have been holding dear since our childhood. She has to leave all this. What is awaiting her family in a new place?

* Dear Sir, this is my brother

Yellow Strips

A new order has been issued. Jews must wear yellow strips. The order says about their size, and the places they have to be sewn to. One has to be on the chest, another - on the back. For non-compliance - death penalty.

From now on this will be our yellow earmark.

x x
 x

The chairman of "Judenrat" - Jewish Committee - was appointed Ilia Mushkin.

x x
 x

The word "requisition" - this is something from the history text-books for me. Here it is now - in reality. All Jews have to turn in gold, silver, valuables in requisition.

We have nothing of this. Our only property is the key from our apartment. I do not throw it out, it reminds me of our prewar life.

Meeting with Asya

There is an order that all able-bodied Jews assemble at the Judenrat. There the labor brigades are being formed to be dispatched to work in the city, outside the ghetto.

Mother and I went there. We met Asechka Vorobeychik and her mother. Asya is my schoolmate. We decided to keep together, and asked to be in one brigade, so that we do not lose each other.

We see other girls: once always cheerful Valya Glazova, the beauty Sofa Sagalchik, and the bright mind Beba Tsveig.

That we met Asya is very important for us.

Old Tema

We live in the Zamkavaya street in the old Tema's home. In the ghetto everybody is allocated two square meters of space. Does each one of us really have those two meters? Old Tema is very tall, withered and scrawny like a mummy. Her face is cut with deep wrinkles.

She keeps aloof, and hers is a life by her own rules. In the moment of despair Tema sits very straight, motionless, her old faded eyes staring at one place.

She might be praying at that moment. We all understand: if she does pray, this is for her grandsons who are in the front, in the Red Army. She prays for its quick return after crushing these villains.

She always wears a long black skirt and a man's coat of the same color.

When we came to live in her small two-room home Tema gave us two mattresses and some bedlinen. This is an incredible luxury. Tema lives in one room with us and sleeps on the old sofa.

The Golands' family live in the other room. Two young women Dina and Era and their mother.

There is a wardrobe in that room. It is always locked. In it there are clothes of Tema's grandsons. The old woman is sure that they soon will be back.

They will put on this, -- she says.

x x
 x

Tema is wealthy! Before the war I was convinced that there were no wealthy people in our country. Strange enough, Tema is.

One of the first orders to Byelorussian and Jewish population was "Hand over Gold!" From that time on the Germans enforce it persistently and resolutely.

Our house was no exception. They demanded it from Tema. They were moving their revolvers in front of the old woman's face and yelling:

- Gold! Gold!

Tema was listless.

And then I saw something I could not believe my eyes.

I thought that Tema was sleeping and tiptoed into the room. The old woman was sitting on the couch and was sewing gold inside her coat.

- Girl, you did not see anything. You did not see and did not know anything, - she said.

But I saw everything. Tema was holding a golden coin in her hands, which she was sewing under the lining. I was startled. I always thought that gold was the state's property.

- I know, girl, what you are thinking about. Long time ago, my grandsons were also surprised when I showed them these coins. Before the revolution I saved money on food, on clothes and got this. When the worst comes...

I saw her sewing one more coin. Then she put on her coat and touched her wealth:

- These beasts will never get it. Let God hear me: at a gun-point I won't give it away!

Roundups

Roundups began in the ghetto. All of a sudden they encircle a street or a district and grab people. Then they put them into trucks and drive somewhere. Some of them turn back home (they were impressed for labor), some don't.

People say there are roundups in the entire city.

Club

Cold and wet morning.

Asya Vorobeychik and I were captured in a roundup. As usually, it was sudden. They threw us into the cars and were driving somewhere. Where? Maybe to the afterworld? We are holding strongly each other by the hands. We have agreed that in case they take us to the execution we either fall down or run away. We arrived quickly. They got us off the cars and counted. We look around and saw: we are in the courtyard of the Government House. It was said that the architect who built it was not satisfied with the design. To his opinion, the building was not beautiful enough. We had never shared this view before. But now we cannot look at it long enough, so much we admire it. Maybe this building has remained for us the symbol of peace and kindness. But this image is dispelled. Now they are in it, beasts, unhumans. Such as this big one, with red eyes, brandishing the whip in front of us. Then he pulls Asya and me and orders us to do something. We don't understand. He is yelling and his whip is kicking the ground near our feet. Fear grips us. He is laughing. Then he points out at the roofing roll on the ground. We begin to understand that he wants us to lift it. We make an attempt but it does not work. The German is beating our hands with the whip. Bloody wales swell on our hands - the pain is intolerable. What shall we do? How can two girls lift such huge roll?

I take it from the front and attempt to put this damned roll on my shoulders. Asya is trying to help me from the rear but the roll does not move.

I hear my friend's shriek and look behind: Asya is lying on the ground, blood on her face.

- Zuruek! *

But I run up to her.

- He ... hit me ...with the whip... on the head...

I help Asya from under the roll. Her body is shaking with seizures. She is opening her blue eyes at me. We are clinging to each other.

Near again the whistle of the whip ...

x x
x

Since that time Asya had suffered from epilepsy.

Hypnosis

He was brought to us on the cold fall day.

- Doctor, please help him...

Mother rushes to the man who is howling wildly.

There are big blue bruises on his blood-covered face. His hands are trembling. There is somebody else's coat on his naked body. Short pants barely cover his calves. His feet are bare.

- Who is he? Where is he from? - asks mother.

The women who brought him shrug their shoulders.

- We don't know anything. He ran into the house but we were not able to help him. Maybe you can...

We put the man in bed. Mother gives him valerian drops, treats his wounds, tries to calm him down in a strange way:

- You eyelids are heavy. You fall asleep, asleep, asleep.

You are warm. Your arms, feet are warm. You are calming down. You are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping.

And the man did fall asleep.

- Is this hypnosis?

Mother does not answer. She is extremely exhausted.

x x
x

This man was from the nearest village.

...The fascists rounded them up at daybreak. They were herded and driven to the ravine. Men were given spades and ordered to dig a pit. Women and children were standing nearby.

*Come back!

Then an order followed to take their clothes off. He remembered his wife Raya undressing herself, he himself rushing up to her and being hit with the butt and sinking to the ground. When he raised the head he saw his naked children - 6-year-old Bebochka and 3-year-old Misha. The fascists put men, women, and children near the ravine.

Gunfire started. He fell down. The dead were falling on him. He somehow managed to get out. Started to look for his wife and children. But he did not hear his own voice.

He hid himself in the bushes. Soon he saw some clothes on the brink of the pit. Probably the marauders did not take all the booty. He looked around, did not see anybody and grabbed the coat and trousers. He went towards Minsk. Thanks God, it was not far. Some kind people gave him a ride.

It was the first time that we heard about such things. And we realized that very soon this was awaiting all of us.

Rumors

People would pick up any word about the breakthrough of our troops. And so strong was our desire to believe this that all the rumors seem more than credible to us. And, really, when we put ears to the ground we feel the earth rumbling with explosions. The battles might be not so far away. It is said our troops are near Mogilyouv, Belinichi, driving the fascists away.

We are awaiting this moment. Everybody says what he would do to them. Hatred and eagerness to retaliate are burning in us. To imagine what we do to Gestapo men, to Hitler himself is one of our favorite pastimes.

What will be the penance for those beasts. But it will be, sure will...

Grandma's potatoes

Grandma was absent the whole day. At night she brought a bag of potatoes...

Where did she take them? She says, dug them out in the Tatars' kitchen gardens. But nothing has been known to be left there a long time ago - no potatoes, no carrots, no swede.

As if in a flash, mother seems to have guessed, and our hearts are struck with pain.

- My God! Did you go to the ghetto to panhandle?

All of us are wailing together with Grandma.

From Berta Moiseevna Bruk's notes

"...After the Jews from all around had been ordered to take residence in the Minsk ghetto, people began to live in cellars. They were sleeping huddled together on wooden bunks put up in tiers. From 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. it was forbidden to talk loudly. When the patrolmen heard loud talk they fired in the windows.

We were starving terribly...

Hunger blurred our memory and ruined us physically. Lyalinka and I crawled under the barbed wire and when a German or a policeman looked aside, ran to the city to search for food.

How happy we were when we safely came home with our catch!.."

Gallows

October. Mother came back from the city where she was looking for her fellow doctors. Maybe somebody will help us get out of the city?

She told us that in the city, on the gallows. the executed were dangling, the plates on their chest: "They were fighting against German power".

Mother was making her way back through rubble. It was such good luck that she was not captured, that we see her again.

Pogrom on the 7th of November

Dina Goland came with disturbing news. She heard that German were encircling Nemiga. Everybody understood it was the beginning of a pogrom. This sinister word breathed of the darkness of the long forgotten past. We knew it from the books, from the stories of our grandmothers and grandfathers.

The grisly word is alive again.

- We have to do something. - Dina said anxiously.

Mother was looking around:

- Where is Grandma?

She had left somewhere.

Mother tells us to be ready. Along the bank of the river we sneak to the bridge. Without yellow strips, kerchiefs on our heads, we look like villagers. We ramble around Torgovaya street, Bakunin street, near the church. Again move towards the river. From this vantage point we see what is going on in the Zamkavaya street. It seems to be quiet there.

- Let us go to Tonya, she will probably let us in, - I am trying to convince mother. (Tonya is our old neighbor).

Mother is thinking about this:

- They live near the very hell. They have had enough of fear...

And, really, Tonya and her mother Darya Stepanovna live in the Shkolnaya street, near the Nemiga river. When people were being shot on the ghetto side of the Nemiga, Tonya's family saw everything.

There is no place for us to go. We are just walking aimlessly. As if stuck to this place, we are wandering around the ghetto. We stop near the bath-house, go up to the hospital, again to the Torgovaya, to the Bakunin streets.

It is raining. We are wet all through, shiver from cold, and huddle to each other.

- Let us go to Tonya, - I ask again.

Mother remembers what a kind and sympathetic woman Darya Stepanovna is and agrees:

- We'll ask to let us in and warm up a little bit.

We hurry to Tonya's. Knock on the door. Darya Stepanovna and Tonya are standing in the doorstep, fear and tears in their eyes,

Tonya's mother silently closes the door. It would hurt again and again as the cracking of the closing door stays in my ears.

x x
x

... We are going to the Grushevskaya that is the far end of the city. The Gurskis are living there. Vladimir Feofilovich was mother's patient before the war.

- They are wonderful people. We shall warm ourselves there, they will give us something to eat, and, probably, will shelter us.

We are going to the Gurskis'.

... It is so wonderful, so warm on the oven. A well-fed cat cuddles near us, then springs on the floor.

- Even the cat is a free being but we... - says Inna, not the way a child would say.

Olga Alexeeyvna treats us with potato pancakes.

We have just eaten soup and now pancakes! How delicious!

Nina and Tasya, daughters of Olga Alexeeyvna and Vladimir Feofilovich are playing with the cat.

Vladmiri Feofilovich enters on his crutches and brings on the plate something miraculous - big pink-yellow pears.

-- Help yourselves. they are from our orchard.

Mother is weeping:

-- Thank you, thank you for everything. Don't bother yourselves. We shall leave now...

-- No, Rahil Aronovna, you are so dear to us! Where will you go now? It is night. Stay with us, something will work out...

We make a decision to leave this wonderful, generous home early in the morning, unnoticed by neighbors. We shall ask to give us some food. In the daytime we shall walk about the city, and try to approach Zamkavaya street. Maybe, our house was not hit by the pogrom? And we know nothing about Grandma.

The Gurskis do not let us go on the 8th of November either. We had been with them two days.

On the 9th, we wake up because somebody pounds on the door.

- Olga, open, please...

Olga Alexeyevna whispers to us:

- Do not be scared. This is our neighbour... Close the curtain and sit still...

We are sitting quietly and are listening to their talk.

-- Olya, Olechka, if anything is going to happen it will cost lives all of us... Just think... Do you know what this all means for us?

-- What is the matter? What are you talking about?

-- Oh, Olechka, don't pretend. The neighbors sent me...

They say you hide somebody. They saw them coming up to your gate. Came in but did not come out. Everybody says they are fugitives, from the ghetto.

-- Who said this? Who saw it?

-- People saw it, Olka.

-- See, we are having emissary from the neighbors, -- Vladimir Feofilovich is pounding with his crutch.-- We had some acquaintances here. Now they left. We do not have anybody here. If you want you may search.

-- I just wanted to caution you... Am I a German or a policeman? Think for yourselves. We shall not get away with this... Think about your own children...

The neighbor closes the door. She did not believe... Agonizing silence follows.

-- Sit down. Don't be afraid, - Vladimir Feofilovich turns the curtain. - We shall have breakfast now.

-- No, no, we shall leave, -- mother jumps down from the oven.

Olga Alekseyevna is weeping.

-- Where are you going to go? To meet your death? I shall hide you in the cellar.

-- You have already done more that you could, Vladimir Feofilovich.

Mother hurries up. We dress ourselves quickly. Olga Alekseyevna wraps me and Inna in warm shawls.

Vladimir Feofilavich, his face white and the teeth clenched, leads us through kitchen gardens to the nearby street.

Then he said:

-- Go to my friend. Here is his address. Say, you are from me... It is not far. I'll be there shortly.

He limps behind us on his crutches. Drops of sweat are on his face, anguish in the eyes.

-- Wait for me there...
-- Good bye, my dear friend...

x x
x

We did not go to the address that Vladimir Feofilovich had given to us. We are just walking aimlessly. Roam the city, and subsist on the bread that Olga Alekseevna put into a bag for us. And we are cold all through.

... We are going in the direction of the Respublikanskaya street. Maybe we shall see the goings on in the ghetto. But there are so many Germans in there!

- Let us go to our Podgorni lane, to the Krasnoarmeyskaya street, - I ask mother.

I do not know why I want so much to go to the place where we had lived before the war.

Mother agrees: does it really matter where we go?

... Just here, on that burnt-down place, was our house. On the second floor there was an apartment with the terrace where we had lived. And bushes of lilac. There is nothing here now, only bare bushes. Just in between them there was my and Nila Kuntsevich's summer-house. Nila and I liked our yard.

We go down along the Krasnoarmeyskaya street. Go along Lodochnaya, Kozhevennaya.

I remember suddenly:

-- Here lives Maya!

-- Who?- mother is looking at me, hope in her eyes.

-- A beauty! A gymnast! You know her mother. It seems she is an epidemiologist!

-Oh!

- Let's go to her. She is a kind woman!

... In a small kitchen there are two unfamiliar women.

- Who do you want to see?

- May we see Maechka?

- Maechka? Yes, of course... Maya, there is somebody here to see you!

Light step. Thick blond hair, radiant eyes.

Maechka rushes to me and shouts happily:

- Mom, see who came to us!

Suddenly she stiffens.

Maya's mother entered the kitchen. Graceful, with sleek hair. She comes to my mother, hugs her and suddenly petrifies too.

- We have just dropped in for a moment. I wanted to say good-bye to you, Maechka. We are leaving the city now. - I am becoming short of breath, but I am mumbling and mumbling something as mother, Inna, and I are retreating to the door.

- Wait a while, I'll put something on and see you to the door.

Maya is running behind:

- Please, don't be upset with us. One of the women whom you saw is the city chief's sister in law... I'll go with you and hide you...

Maya goes with us across the street. She brought us into the gas-shelter.

- Stay here for a while. We'll bring you food...

Maya runs home. Soon her mother came. She brought hot soup, hugged us and cried. But she must hurry. Curfew will soon start.

- Thank you, - mother whispers.

It is night. Metal sheet is rumbling on the roof. How many they are, those night sounds and how threatening are all of them!

Inna and I cuddle near mother. She warms us with her breath.

On the Ostrovski Street

Zamkavaya street had not been hit by pogrom. So far... Grandma is alive. Hunger and hardships for the aged is too much to bear. From time to time she touches us. She can't believe we are back. We learn from Leva Markin - a witness and a victim of the pogrom on the 7th of November - about the happenings here. The boy managed somehow to break from the very hell, the Ostrovski street.

He and others recount:

...From the houses on the Ostrovki, not far from the church all tenants were driven out. As they were being herded together, the Germans were beating them with butts and whips. Children were losing their parents. The parents fumbled in the crowd desperately looking for them.

A woman, wild eyes, screams:

- Manechka, Olya, Zyama!

- Mom, I am here!

The boy rushes to his mother.

People huddle so tightly as if compressed. The mother raises her hands over the head.

- You, beasts, - the woman yells into the Germans' faces.

One of them shot. The woman fell and hung motionlessly on somebody's back. There is even no space to fall down. And suddenly it becomes very quiet.

- She is dead! Dead! - people are whispering.

Suddenly a commotion again. Germans shove people trying to form them in a column.

The woman lies, blood on her head, on the pavement. Her little daughter and son are running to her. Now they have found her and lean to their dead mother.

A man tears them away from her. He is not children's father. Their father is in the Red Army. This is the neighbor, Simkin from the house # 1 on the Ostrovksaya which is near the church.

They are Samuil Ozer's children, - he says to somebody in the column.

Manya, Olya, and Zyama - are in one row with Simkin.

The procession moves up the Ostrovskaya, in the direction of the bread factory.

Suddenly, a policeman runs up to Simkin, who was at the edge of the row. He tucks a bundle into his hands and orders to open it.

- There is a holiday today!* - the policeman shouts. - Observe it.

Simkin unfolds the parcel. It is the red banner. It was so unexpected that he drops it. And now Zyama picks up the banner and raises it over the column.

Several desperate steps forward... Zyama falls on the pavement hit by bullets...

Germans and policemen drive the procession further, towards the death.

From Lyala Bruk's Dairy

"... At night from 6th to 7th of November we heard pounding on the door and shouts: "Open!" It was the pogrom. The Germans broke in and ordered to assemble at the door. Mother, my little nephew Tolik, and I came out. On that night father stayed at the former factory "October" where he had been working several days.

We were driven to the Khlebnaya street. Here the columns were formed and we were put into the closed trucks.

No words can describe the grisly sight - there were old, helpless people, women, children. Some of them could not walk, fell down, wailed and cried for help.

We saw some people showing the Germans their certificates of employment as laborers. They were moved out from the column. Mother showed the certificate that she was a doctor. But this did not work. Now it was our turn to get on the truck. Mother attempted once again to show her certificate - this time to the officer. He gave the signal, and the policeman drove us into the yard of the bread factory.

To our torture and humiliation, we were forced to stand on our knees. They shot everybody who did not obey.

At 4 o'clock the armed guards left their posts, and we were released.

Next day in the morning father came home and had to go to work right away. Shortly after that Germans came and moved us out of the house. They allowed us to take as much luggage as we could carry. Then drove us to the Jewish committee. All wet from rain, we were expecting that some shelter will be allocated to us. This did not happen and we went to the hospital.

* 7th of November was a holiday of October revolution

Later father found a tiny room and we moved there. We sent Tolyushka (his father was Russian) to the city to Lena Sokolova, and she sheltered him..."

From Berta Moiseevna Bruk's Notes

"...This is incomprehensible... How could this happen? To designate for annihilation the whole region... To assemble all people living there, without any exception, the old and children, and drive them to the before-prepared ravines. They throw people there alive... Then they pour fuel on them..."

The Gestapo men kept firing into this moving grave till it was becoming tedious for them...

After the pogrom the doctor Livshitz, the wife of the radiologist, ran into the hospital. She managed to get out of the ravine. She had burns and injuries. She told us about the people being thrown into the pits and set ablaze alive.

...I keep recalling how we have survived this pogrom, how I showed the Germans the certificate that I was a doctor, the department head of the hospital for infectious diseases. Later even the ghetto Commandant Gottenbakh told that the personnel from the hospital of infectious diseases will be the last to be killed.

I remember being beaten with the butt when I showed this paper. Fortunately, later, thanks to this paper, when my daughter, three-year old grandson and I were shoved into the truck, one German let us go.

I also remember how we, "the exempted", were commanded to stand on the knees on the wet pavement and stare at one point. My three-year old grandson kept asking whether he was doing this in the right way. And he was trembling with cold like an aspen leave...

... When we returned home in the evening, we saw the empty apartments. It became dark, and the neighbors came home from work: two brothers whose families were killed. One of them cut his veins, and I watched out the other one. My daughter did her utmost to comfort him. In the morning my husband Zhenya came who had been despatched to work in the city the day before. Zhenya looked at us and could not believe we were alive. Just there the two dead were lying: a mother and a child. They were killed for disobedience."

Requiem

This order is posted everywhere in the city. It tells that in reprisal of the subversive activities against the German power "one hundred jids-communists had been killed". If subversive activities continue, killings would not stop. The toll for each riot is fifty men.

Among the killed is our acquaintance Semyon Mikhailovich Klebanov and his thirteen-year old son Tima. This Tima had not yet had a chance to become a Communist!

...Timka-Timur is dead. His mandolin is hanging on the wall. Its strings seem to be playing requiem.

Can Birth Certificate Protect One?

Mother often remembers her friend Ekaterina Loginovna Bessmertnaya. And I often think about her daughter Lida. Their family must have been evacuated.

Ekaterina Loginovna would have helped us, - mother says.

Mother's friends Manya Grigoryevna Neimark and Bela Moiseevna Davidovich live in the ghetto.

Manya is a kind and generous soul. The house in which she had lived before the war did not burn down. In order to survive, Manya barterers her belongings for food. Manya Grigoryevna lives in the Khlebni lane. A wonderful name! The smell of bread* emanates from it...

Bela Moiseevna is a teacher. She had long suffered from thyroid, still before the war. Even now, starving, she did not lose weight. She is stout and moves slowly. I like very much the stories about her former students.

Her students do not forget her. Sasha Myagotin, Kolya Malishko and Katya Iorina came to say hello to her. Children came up to the barbed wire to see her and handed over some food.

Bela Maiseevna worries about her daughter Ela. She managed to obtain fake birth certificate for her daughter and settle her in the village near Osipovichy. The girl has now different first and last name.

I recall...

What have they done to our city? Wreckage, black openings of the windows, and steady smoke smell. I have a feeling that if I ever forget what our Minsk looked like, forget the street where we lived, our yard, our one-room apartment with a deck, our communal kitchen, and all those whom I've been with through my childhood, it would be a betrayal.

And I would not allow myself to forget all this. Nothing is there any more: no house, no yard. Everything has been reduced to ashes. And people - life has thrown them apart.

In my dreams I often roam: from the Podgorni Lane to the Musical school in the Svoboda square. And I have my notes folder with me. There are Cherni's etudes, Bach's preludes in it... Now I'll enter the classroom. Mariya Yakovlevna Shlapakova, my teacher, will listen to me...

* The word Khlebni has the root "Khleb" which means "bread in Russian

Unfortunately the labor columns do not pass the Podgorni Lane, the Svoboda* Square. This square really has a wonderful name!.

Pogrom on the Twetieth of November

It is cold, no sleep this night. The oven is cold, no way to warm up. The old Tema does not have firewood. She just throws in a couple of logs in the morning. But it does not keep house warm long enough.

At daybreak I go out. I put on a light coat, and though it is frosty I do not feel cold.

Just the day before we had talked with mother what are we going to wear. We have one warm winter coat for all of us.

I run up Zamkavaya street. I am glad that I do not freeze:

- I'll do well in a summer coat...

I am looking steadily across the river. It seems to be quiet outside the wire. Yet there is roaring sound on the right, from the Nemiga side. It is becoming louder - the autos are approaching. I am trying to convince myself that they are not necessarily heading for the ghetto. I come back and do not believe my eyes. The autos are all around. Soldiers in German uniform are jumping from them and surrounding the district.

I can hardly run up to the house and scream:

- Pogrom!

Everybody is dressed momentarily. Mother clutches Inna to her, and grabs a loaf of bread, then gives it to me. She helps grandmother tie her kerchief, put on her boots.

The reasonable Dina says:

-- This seems to be the last episode...

(Dina's favourite saying, or to be more precise, conclusion is "Life is a chain of episodes").

We have been thrown out from home. There are many people in the yard. They might have been pulled out from nearby houses. Here is Dvorkin, a handsome man. His tall figure and gray head are seen from the distance. Near him is his daughter Zinachka, with her long braids. The engineer Livshitz. He is coming up to us, takes off his hat, says hello. It is weird, now, at that moment...

I think they will begin to fire at us near that red brick house. My God, they will shoot us at the house where not long ago my friend Tata- Tanechka Drozdova used to live. She and her parents were moved out from there.

And really they push us to this wall. The Germans start to count people and push them in different sides. We prey not to be seperated.

They seem to be sorting us out. I can distinguish clearly two words: "Leben", "Tod"**. It means that in one column there will be people whose destiny is to live, in another one - those who will be shot. We get into the second one. People understand what is

* "Svoboda" means "freedom" in Russian

** "Leben" means "life" in German, "Tod" - "death"

awaiting them. From the column of death they run to the column of life.

Fire started. Suddenly I step on something soft and fall down. I see white-blue face of a girl and recognize her. This is our neighbor Sima Kotlyarova, Dina's friend. I shake her and say:

- Stand up!

Dina says:

- She won't stand up: she has been shot. Wanted to get over the wire.

Until that moment my thinking was strangely clear. Now It is muddled:

- Has she been shot?!

...Soldiers surround us.

...Where are they driving us? Up along the Dmitrov street...

Maybe to the Yubileynaya square? To Judenrat?

The procession is being escorted from both sides, every other row. Our row, with mother, grandma and myself, is not guarded. But the guards are in front and behind of us. Those who attempt to break from the procession are shot immediately.

I remember that I have bread in my hands and begin to eat. That is incredible but I satisfy my hunger. I hand bread over to mother. She looks at me surprised.

Where are they driving us? Ours is a death column. Are we really going to die? No, one cannot believe in this! Maybe, things will change abruptly? Maybe rescue will come from somewhere?

In front of the column one could see tall figure and old Tema's straight bearing. Dvorkin holds his long-braided Zinochka by the hand. Dina is supporting her mother and elder sister Era who can barely move her legs swollen from hunger. In the same column there are the engineer Livshitz, Senya Poplavski, a college student before the war, Zora Strongina - former pioneer leader, an always cheerful singer. There is also the Nizovs' family, their twins, ten-year old Marlen and Stalina... And, probably, all these people do not believe in their death either.

- I want to live! - Inna's voice slashes the silence.

And again silence.

- Mother,- I hear my Mother's whisper, as she speaks to Grandma, - We have to save children... We shall try to run away on that turn. Hold on to me.

- I cannot, my feet would not go, - answers Greandma. - Save children. Run away with them...

- How can we without you?

- I'll not make it... Save children...

Mother tells me to rip off the yellow strip from my chest. She also rips them off herself and Inna. It is impossible to do the same with the strips on our backs, the guards behind will see this.

No, We are not going to the Ubileynaya Square. They have already taken us outside the boundaries of the ghetto. We are being moved along the Opanski street. And suddenly on the left side of the street we saw horse-driven wagon approaching our column. In a moment it will catch up with us.

- Jump on the wagon, - mother pushes us from the column. We jump on the wagon, mother follows us. The villager drives like crazy. There is a commotion, screams, shooting behind. Fire at us. But we are far from the column. We rip off yellow strips from the back.

- Run away! Rescue yourselves! - the villager is shouting.

x
x x

We hide ourselves in the debris of the bombed-out building. Mother is agonizing over Grandma's fate.

- Our poor Grandma, poor Grandma she went on with them...

She says, blind-eyed:

- Where are they moving them? My poor mom...

Shall we ever see her again?

We are sobbing, all sorrow and despair.

We are getting out of debris. Where shall we go, where shall we get? We stopped on the Svoboda square. We see people moving towards the catholic church. I remember us, pioneers, carrying out anti-religious propaganda. We were waiting for the believers to come out after service and were telling them that religion was opium for the people.

Mother says we have to enter the church. Let's make an impression that we are just believers.

- We shall stay there for a while, warm up and go on...

Everybody is standing on the knees. Mother tells us to do the same. I cannot. Mother is imploring in a low whisper:

- Don't draw anybody's attention... We may be held up.

Service over, we leave the church. Where shall we go? To our Byelorussian friends? It is not safe either for them or for us. There is only one way left for us - to the ghetto.

x x
x

We decided to come up to the ghetto from the Zamkavaya side. We come closer. Not far from us there is a patrolman. It is strange but he wears Red Army uniform. We ask him to let us in our house, take some of our belongings.

- You are ours, in a Red Army uniform, - I say.

Mother grabs my by the sleeve.

- What do you mean "ours", - the patrol yells.

- Please allow us to take warm coat, - mother says. - We shall just take a coat and leave...

The patrol is looking around. There is nobody here. He shoves me forward:

- Go! But be very quick... And you stay away from here, - he commands to mother and Inna.

I hurry into the house. This is not a home any more but graves. Some hours ago there were people here, living, moving, talking. Here is our dear Grandma's chair. She liked to sit on it warming herself near the oven. Old Tema's bed. The mattress near the wardrobe on which Dina and Era were sleeping. Did these people do any harm to anybody? Why is all this?

I am crying bitterly sitting on the chair. I am looking around trying to see the coat and the bag with food. Why am I sitting? I have to leave as soon as possible!

And suddenly, like ghosts, there are two Germans in gray-green uniforms in the doorway. There are huge badges on their chests. Gendarmerie patrol service... I did not hear them enter the open door. Fear -stricken, I am looking at their chained badges or their boots. The voice of a German brings me to reality:

- Wer bist du? Eine Judin?*

I cannot believe myself but I feel fear going away. Let be what may!.

- Jawohl, - I say, - Eine Judin.**

The Germans exchange looks.

- Wo ist dein Mutter?***

- Dort, - I point out to the street, - und Schwester dort.****

- Wo ist deine Fater?*****

- In der Roten Armee. *****

Take it, bastards! I am not afraid any more! Kill me! I am a Jew! My father is in the Red Army! Kill me!

The Germans look at each other again.

- Was macht du jetzt hier?*****

I answer that I came here after the pogrom, that we had lived here...

- Armes Kind,***** - says one German and asks where I studied the German language.

I answer quickly that we studied German at school, and that I came to take some of our belongings. The German is throwing somebody's clothing to me and tells me to take it. I say that I do not want to take things that do not belong to me.

The German asks whose medicine box hangs on the wall. I say that was my mother's.

* - Who are you? A Jew?

** - Yes, I am a Jew.

*** - Where is your mother?

**** - Over there... And sister also

***** - Where is your father?

***** - In the Red Army

***** - What are you doing here?

***** - Poor child.

- Ist deine Mutter Arzt?*

I nod. He looks at the box.

- Arme Apotheke. **

Another German keeps silence all the time.

It is noisy outside. There is a crowd over there.

- Rouaber,*** - the German explains to his comrade that the people loot in the homes of the dead.

He allowed me to take what I needed.

Will they let me go? I cannot believe in what was happening. I put on the coat, seize the bag with the food and go out. The Germans are following behind. Only one thought is throbbing hauntingly:

- Now they will shoot me...

I hear firing from the place where mother and Inna were. I rush there. Mother is holding the bleeding hand and is bending down. We support her and look for help.

After Escape

We are in the boiler room of the hospital for infectious diseases. Here doctor Kulik, mother's prewar acquaintance, treated her wound. Fortunately, it is not serious but mother is weakened from hunger and from everything we have lived through. She does not stop agonizing over Grandma's death.

Our Grandma, our mother's mother is not among the living any more. Overwhelmed with pain, we recall her faded eyes, gray streaks of hair, arms with swollen veins. The hard-working hands.

I am worried about mother's growing weakness.

- Why did not she run away with us, - says mother in despair as she is weeping like a child.

But grandmother with her swollen legs could not run. And in general, our rescue is an incredible luck. But for this villager with his wagon, we would never have been able to flee.

Doctor Kulik is looking for a shelter for us. In the boiler-room it is so nice and warm. But all the time some people are coming here. Probably, our presence hinders something. It seems there was one man from the city, either Byelorussian or Russian. He had light hair and eyes.

... Doctor Kulik found a shelter for us - in the Slobodski lane. But we have to wait several days. We sleep in a secret hiding - at mother's friend doctor Krasnoselski. He lives close to the Yubileyni farmers market, near Judenrat. Not far from here lives also artistic director Mikhail Zorev - the pride of the Byelorussian theater.

...There are still posters in the city with the name of the performance "The Last", which he did in the Byelorussian theater. I was at the first night. An indelible impression! What a happy

* - Is your mother a doctor?

** - Poor medication box.

*** - Marauders.

moment from our prewar life this was! Mikhail Zorev keeps asking mother, Inna and I how we managed to flee from the death column.

... It has already been known where people from that column were killed. In Tuchinka, our grandma was among them...

Facharbeiter

There is one more German word being passed around: "Facharbeiter". It means a "specialist". This category includes tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, painters and so on. In other words, laborers with high qualifications. Germans give them additional food rations. It was rumoured that they would not be shot. The members of the intelligentsia also started to think what they can do to pass for "facharbeiter".

Romka

Little Romka runs up to the barbed wire.

He is waiting for the labor column where his mother is. She will bring him something to eat. He had gnawed the oven but did not satisfy his hunger.

Her it is it last, his mother's column! In front of it there are his aunts Faina and Yulya. Here is mother... She is waving her hand at him. Maybe she will bring bread? Romka is impatient, he is running to her outside the wire. He is already very close to his mother. And suddenly somebody grabs him from behind.

- Don't shoot, - wild scream of a woman who is Romka's mother is slashing the air.

The German does not shoot. He twists the boy's arms. And they dangle helplessly, like those of a doll.

- Let us run to the doctor Siterman. He will do something, - Faina says.

...Siterman is not at home. Germans dispatched the professor to clean toilets...

To Be Taken Prisoner is the Worst

The End of January.

In the morning people who were driven in columns along the Mogilyovskaya street saw a dismal scene: an awful lot of dead bodies all around in the street. These are prisoners of war. They were without clothes, with bare feet. The fascists pulled them out, in such frost, and shot. The word is spread that in the Sovetskaya street there is the same grisly sight...

Where is Father? Let the fate spare him this...

Wonderful People

We have got acquainted with two girls in the Slobodski Lane - Bronya and Lena Goldman. Their mother Nekhama Samoilovna has a friend Vanda Iosifovna Oparina. They have been friends since childhood.

The house where Vanda Iosifovna and her husband Feliks Tomofeyevich had lived was burnt, they were left with nothing. They have neither clothes, nor food. Their sister, a villager, supports them, and once in a while Vanda Iosifovna brings from the village potatoes or flour.

Risking her life, Bronya visits the Oparins who try to help the girls. During the first pogrom the Oparins were hiding Bronya and Lena.

The Oparins have been also visiting the Goldmans in the ghetto. Once such visit could have cost life to Vanda Iosifovna.

There is one more person who supports them. This is their prewar neighbor, old Luiza, with whom they lived in the Belorusskaya street before the war. She is a German but she hates fascists. Sometimes she comes to the place where Bronya's and Lena's column work, will see Bronya, talk with the guards and sneak her the bag with food.

It is a blessing to know these wonderful people.

The Last Meeting

They killed Berta Moiseyevna, Ella's mother. Near the barbed wire while she was talking with her student.

In spite of danger, the children came to see their teacher.

Big, stout, with bulging from exophthalmic disease eyes, she was standing near the wire, yellow strips on her clothes. And near her - her pupils... On that side of the wire eight-graders Sasha Myagotin, Kolya Malishko, Katya Iorina... Shooting cut off that meeting.

The policeman warded them off:

- Do you want trouble?

Kolya showed him the fist.

Bela Moiseyevna was killed for the violation of the order by the new power. Jewish citizens were not allowed to establish any contacts with Byelorussian population.

She was hanging on the wire, her clothes torn, dead but surrendering nothing of her dignity... It seemed as if she wanted to say:

- When you have such students, your life is not worthless...

Tomatoes for Mother

Faina is very weak from hunger. We subsist somehow on watery vegetable soup, but with her sick heart to work so hard... She is lying, can't stand up.

- I'll go instead of you, Mom, and bring soup to you, - her son Misha says.

Mother hugs him, all gratefulness and sorrow. She fears for his life.

Faina is looking into the thin air, as if she sees there her husband Mysya, Moisei Kofman. How is he doing there, in the Red Army?

Faina says to us:

- Do not leave him alone. I would feel better if you work together...

Misha had already used before to go to work instead of her. He takes out several pfeninngs.

- Near the farmers market I'll leave the column for a moment and buy something for you to eat, Mom!

- No, do not leave the column, sonny. We'll do without it. I'll rest today, probably tomorrow I'll be better.

We go to work together: Misha, Asya and I. He is running in front of us, hopping and singing something. With black eyes and his light gait, he is like a venetian gondollier.

...We are unloading coal. Once in a while we watch out Misha. He is black from coal dust, only eyes are shining. We are exhausted by long hours of work. After we finish, we stand in the line for soup. Misha has some extra portion - a full pot. He is going to bring it to his mother. The boy is happy and hums some tune.

As we are going home past the Myasnikov street and approaching the small farmers market, I see Misha in front of me. I see the back of his head, the pot in his hand.

Suddenly he runs from the column, dashes to the market, hands over pfenings to the peddler. Asya and I are looking at each other. Misha is in the prohibited section, a sinister yellow blaze on his back. We call him back looking around us: lest the patrol sees all this.

In a moment Misha comes back. He is holding a tomato in his hand. Red and big. Mesmerized we are looking at the tomato recalling the long-forgotten fabulous taste in our mouths. We feel relieved:

...- It's over..

He is showing proudly the tomato:

- For mother!

What is this? Something black shows up near Misha. Or, rather, somebody in black. I still do not realize what has happened but feel trouble.

- SS, - whispers Asya in horror.

We move aside. Misha too. SS-man grabs him, pushes him back into the column, puts the gun at the back of his head and yells frantically:

- Fortwaerts!*

Misha dashes aside. But the SS-man shoves him into the column. He holds the gun at Misha's neck. I feel dizzy, the ground removing from under my feet. I hold on to Asya.

* Forward!

We are approaching the Nemiga. I see the boy stumbling. He falls down. For a moment I think that he is sobbing from horror, from all this nightmare.

The SS-man is kicking him with the feet, makes him stand up and holds the gun at the back of his head.

I cannot bear all this any longer and scream something, . Hear wailing all around me.

And suddenly... shooting. Misha is lying in the puddle of blood. Near him is the pot, from which the soup is leaking and a blood-red tomato. The tomato for his mother...

Search

Mirka from the Judenrat! That is how we name that despicable Mirka Mirkman who is working in some office under the Judenrat. How can there be such people? She is young and smart, and fear grips both the young and the old at hearing her name.

I happened to be in the neighboring house when she came there searching for valuables.

- Where is gold? Gold! Whom do you hide it for?

- Who are you working for? - asked the old carpenter Sendar Gorelik. - Don't exert yourself... Anyway you'll be there, - and he pointed out to the ground.

Mirka's eyes sparkled with hatred. The old man shook his head sadly.

She was rummaging through the wardrobe, beds, threatening:

- You won't hide it... We'll find anyway.

How one feels ashamed for such people... So much ashamed...

The Closed Doors

Disturbing thoughts. Mother went to the city again... It was so terribly risky! She is looking for some liaison to get out of this hell, and tries to obtain some food. We could hardly wait for her return.

I do not fear for myself, - she says. - When I go out of here and tear off the yellow strips I feel much better.

We have some hope that she will be safe with bright eyes. Germans assume that all Jews have black eyes... But policemen...

Today mother looks sad. She went to her prewar acquaintance, the nurse Lyudmila Andreyevna whom she had worked together for many years. She lives in the Pulikhov street in her own house and has a kitchen garden. On her way there mother did not see anybody familiar though this could easily have happened. This is the district where we used to live before the war. Podgorni Lane, Krasnoarmeyskaya, close to the Pulikhov.

Mother knocked at the door. In the doorway there was Lyudmila Andreyevna herself. She looked at mother and silently closed the door.

- I used to want so much, - mother tells, - that she be married to our father's brother from Leningrad!

Plying Her Trade

Kontsevaya might be 45-50 years old. Not tall, portly, with gray hair and steady look of the light eyes.

Klara Efimovna is a gynecologist. She does not have job in the ghetto.

Like us, she is a handyperson at the firm "Gotse-Leyman". (Gotse and Leyman are the owners of the firm). Kontsevaya is beaten more often than others because she is old and weak.

She is well-known in the city. Sometimes when there are no patrols around, women come up to the wire and ask for the doctor or hand something over to her. They are her prewar patients. Risking their lives, they come here to reward this woman for her kindness.

Sometimes they come to the place where we work, in the Sverdlov street. Germans gave this street their own name - SigesstraBe.

We were surprised to see a man there. We saw that he was in panic as he was saying something to Kontsevaya. He was, probably, asking her for something... Klara Efimovna whispered something to him and he left...

Kontsevaya approaches us:

- Girls I have to go and help his wife - she feels bad. They are my friends...

- And what if somebody asks where you are going?

- I have to go...

We watch silently her disappearing in the ruins behind our privy. Thanks God, nobody has noticed this...

x x
x

In the morning, Eva Khazina who supervises our column says the number: forty. She might have not counted us by the roster.

...We go down to the basement. Klara Efimovna is waiting for us there. She gives us a needle and a thread. Asya hides herself in the corner and sews on her yellow strips.

- A girl was born, - Kontsevaya whispers happily.

We go out and pull the cart. Shortly we see near the boulevard the man who was coming to her yesterday. He came to make sure that everything was OK with the doctor. He makes a barely visible good-bye nod and leaves...

Soon we learn everything.

The man who was coming to Kontsevaya was the father of the woman in premature labor. Her husband is in the Red Army. Being a former highly visible party official, she could be arrested if taken to the hospital. He wanted to take his daughter to the relatives in Nesvizh but it was late.

That is why he decided to ask for help his old friend, the doctor. Risk is far too obvious for both sides, but there was no other choice. We are looking at Klara Efimovna. Her face got young and beautiful.

- I have done what I had to do, - she says.

x x
 x

...The grandfather of a newborn child appeared again. He was looking for Klara Efimovna but could not find her. Looking around he came up to us:

- Tell the doctor... Everything is OK with us. We gave the girl her name...

...But there was nobody to say this to. Klara Efimovna was shot in a roundup. To run away - she could not make it.

Funerals

January, 1942.

Senya Temkin's father died. How worried was Senya about him!... How hard he tried to save him.

He was the one to take care of the whole family. He ventured outside the wire into the city, to smuggle some food for his mother and his younger sister Rivochka. Her hair is tangled and the belly is swollen from hunger - she looks horrible.

Senya's father might have lived longer but the unexpected had happened.

Once the gestapo men and policemen from the ghetto security service broke into the house. Mirka Mirkman, as well as Sagalovichs father and son, were with them. They demanded gold. While searching for it, they pulled down a sick man from the bed.

They found nothing (there has never been any gold in this house!). The furious gestapo man pushed the iron barrel on the father, injured his leg, that caused sepsis...

...They had to bury father. Senya got outside the wire to look for some planks for a casket in the city. He met the people who gave him three planks. He had been digging the frozen ground for three days...

Humaneness Against All Odds

That even in such evil times people remain kind to each other makes us feel better. For example, David Shakhnavich Godar. As he was going along the Kolektornaya street, he saw a boy lying on the snow. He helped him stand up and brought him to his home.

This boy - Senya Temkin. Senya wanted to get over the wire and look for food but passed out from hunger.

The man gave the boy tea, and his wife said:

- Here are my stockings. I have nothing else. Sell them and buy potatoes.

Senya bartered stockings for potatoes. When he brought them home mother began eating them uncooked.

When David Shakhnavich finds some remainders of food he shares them with Senya's family.

The Loss

The chairman of Judenrat Ilia Mushkin is dead. Everybody says he was a remarkable man: smart, clever, kind, tried to reduce a number of fascists' victims. Everybody feels his death is an immense loss.

They say that he saved even people who were sentenced to death, from the bunker.

I saw Mushkin several times near the Judenrat. Tall, handsome, composed, dignity in his bearing. He commanded everybody's trust.

He was hung.

... He was replaced by somebody from Poland by the name Ioffe. What kind of a man is this one?

About New Habits

I am sure to be not the only one to have this feeling: I cannot bear somebody standing behind me or following me. It seems that something terrible is going to happen. I feel creepy and nauseous.

That happen to me after Misha's murder. I still continue to see the tomato that he was carrying to his mother. When I live through all this hell will this dreadful feeling remain?

We developed new habits. One of them is putting our footwear in a specific place, just to be able to put them on at any alarm. In order to escape! Where? From death!

About the Most Important

In our group there is Sara Khatskelevna Levina. She is young, full of dynamism and vitality, with lovely face. She and her husband are from Vilno. They speak Russian with a slight Polish accent. This accent has been familiar to me since my childhood. That was the way our neighbor, my friend's Nila Kuntsevich mother spoke.

I like very much Sarachka's husband Boris Levin. A handsome, gifted man, he is both a poet and an artist. They have a daughter -Alechka - a sweet, light-haired kid.

I have a feeling that Sarachka has some links to the city's underground. She had not worked in our column before. Now once in a while she joins the column of the firm "Gotse-Leyman". I noticed

that during work hours she sometimes disappeared. She certainly went to the city. Maybe some of her Byelorussian friends established a liaison with partisans? She seems to like mother and us. One could feel that this was a woman of courage and character.

There is an overwhelming fear all around us - people are scared of everything. Something has to be done, there must be a way out. Who else can we get in touch with in the city? Mother's visit to her former prewar friend, the nurse Lyudmila Andreyevna, did not bring any results...

We have to get more intimately familiar with Sarachka...

This Time Spared

Mara Entina works in some firm at the freight railway station: she unloads the cars, carries sacks with cement, bricks, stones. There is something very attractive about her, with her pretty face and firmness in her eyes. One Byelorussian boy is in love with her. They used to be in one school. He brings her food and tries to rescue her from the ghetto.

Once she went through a terrible ordeal. A German came into her room purportedly to ask if she had geographical maps and a radio set.

She answered no. The German looked at her intently and started to shove her towards the bed. She screamed.

Her father broke into the room with the axe, the neighbors also came.

It is amazing that the German did not shoot. The fate spared them this time.

Leyman

Back, neck, arms ache, the legs are faltering. How many wheelbarrows with stones, clay, cement we have pulled! At first we counted them - five, ten, twenty - then stopped. We have been fortunate today. We have rested twice since the morning. It was Otto overseeing us who allowed this. Otto is not "the brown kind" Even outwardly he looks different from those thugs. His eyes are kind and for some reason sad. He always allows us to rest when there is Leyman, the owner of the firm for which we work, is not around.

Leyman is going around the construction site, looks into everything and yells loudly. His shrill, raucous voice is heard from the distance. We hide ourselves from him. I have never before heard such repulsive voice. The soul aches from it just as from the the whistle of the whip that its owner always carries with him. Leyman applies full strength when he beats. He would come up and lash all of a sudden as if with a saber slash. Or, as if he offers you a skipping-rope game that you fail - receive a blow on your

feet. And then he is roaring with laughter. This laughter scares you stiff.

His look is also intimidating. He has red hair, red face with a swollen nose, faded eyebrows and green malicious eyes. His footwear alone scares: high leather gaiters with belts and metal buckles.

I hate him. He has recently beaten my mother. At that moment I felt as if he were beating me too. Was beating and laughing with joy.

... Together with Gita Efimovna Matskevich, a beautiful, poised woman, a doctor, mother is pulling a wheel-barrow. Leyman enjoys this: two doctors in one harness. He is watching them out carefully, a whip in his hands.

Asya and I are following mother and Gita Efimovna. Suddenly mother stumbles and falls down. The liquid mass leaks from the wheel-barrow.

I dash to mother.

Leyman hit her on the back putting all his force into the blow. I am running to her rescue. I snatch the whip in the air. I am no longer afraid of this villain, just sorrow lumps in my throat. I am crying and shout as loud as I can:

- Schlage Mutti nicht! Sie ist doch ein Mensch!*

It is amazing but Leyman stops beating. He is looking either at mother or at me. Then turns to Otto. Otto is looking at him reproachfully.

Leyman shrieks: "Verfluchte Juden!"** and steps away.

Otto

Otto looks kind and sympathetic. He is not young, probably over forty... He obviously has a crush on the Jewish woman Edith.

There are two women from Germany working with us - Edith and Linda who live in the sonderghetto. The sonderghetto is the place for the Jews brought here from various cities of Germany and Western Europe. But here they are called "German" or, even more often, "Hamburg" Jews. Being within our ghetto, Sonderghetto is cut off from it by the wire.

Edith and Linda keep together. Linda is small and frail. She follows Edith like shadow. Even in these conditions Edith keeps herself with dignity. A mass of light hair, long thin neck, light-gray eyes with long eyelashes. She has light gait like a ballet-dancer. Maybe she is really a ballet-dancer?

Asya and I are looking at Otto and Edith. The German likes to talk with her. We often see Linda and Edith eating gray German bread. This is, of course, Otto's treat.

Mine and Otto's eyes meet. He says something to Edith, then turns to me.

* - Don't hit mother! She is a human being!

** - Damned Jews!

It turned out, Edith wants to learn to speak Russian. I do not understand this: to learn Russian now, when one does not know whether he or she is going to live the next hour! Edith starts a conversation:

-- I understand the words: bhred, house, citu.

Oh! She already knows some words.

- Bitte* - I am nervous.

- Huebsches Kind,** - Otto says.

Edith explains that Otto talks about me, that I remind him of his daughter Magda...

Isn't it amazing? Somewhere in Germany there is a girl who looks like me!

Maybe this German is kind to me because I remind him about his daughter? But he is kind to other people in the ghetto too...

"Remember. on the Mogilyov Highway"

On the Sverdlov street, near the factory kitchen, I unexpectedly met my dear friend Nila Kuntsevich. Soft-pink complexion, dimples on the cheeks, long chestnut braids.

We were hiding together in the gas shelter. There was also there a group of the midget-actors from the circus. We laughed a lot when Inna asked a woman-midget:

- You are a little girl. Why are you wearing high-heeled shoes?

Through our entire life we've been together. We exchanged books, sang the same songs, took care of the same flowers near our windows.

Nila's father is a communist. I had not known before if they had managed to evacuate. Now I know they had not.

We hugged each other warmly. I am worried that it might be not safe for Nila to be seen with me, with those dreadful yellow marks.

- Where are you now? Where is your family?

- We are not in Minsk now, - she answers. - It is not safe here for father. Many people know him here. What about you? What are you going to do? Don't turn around... There is a German behind...

Nila says hastily:

- Remember just in case: we are now in Volma, on the Mogilyov highway.

We quickly say good-bye to each other.

- Remember, on the Mogiloyv highway...

- I shall remember, Nila...

Gottenbakh

Gottenbakh is the last name of one of the ghetto's commandants. His title in German is "Herr des Ghettos" (Boss of the ghetto) Square figure is the green uniform, and square red face. Everybody is terrified at the sound of his name.

* - Sure

** - A nice kid.

When his car pulls over in the ghetto territory, everybody expects something terrible to happen. We know that his arrival means the start of roundups.

That is why all the ghetto held breath and hushed when on the last day of February Gottenbakh's car stopped at the Judenrat on the Ubileynaya Square. The word spread immediately.

Gottenbakh said in the Judenrat:

- Five thousand people... For special assignments...

Some people really think that the Germans will need so many people for some special assignments.

x x
 x

Warily, some people start to dig shelters. Day and night. In various places: in cellars and under ovens. They bring food supplies, hoard water.

Our shelter is just in ordinary cellar.

Two previous pogroms - on October 7th and November 20th 1941 began at sun-up.

Nothing happened on the 1st of March. The night of the 2nd of March we are not sleeping and looking from the windows. The venturesome go out, look around and ask each other questions. No news. As usually, there are German patrols and policemen at the wire. Maybe the fate will spare us?

When time comes to go to work the tension eases. There appears hope...

Pogrom on the 22nd of March

About noon my Byelorussian friends Nata and Nina came to us:

- Do not go to the ghetto. There is a pogrom there!

I recall immediately Gottenbakh's words: "Five thousand people!" That is why so many people were not dispatched for labor today. Our column was fortunate - it was one of the first to be outside the ghetto. But mother and Inna are there... I try to hope they save themselves.

What shall I do? What?

-- I shall run there, to the wire.

- Where? - Nata and Nina stop me. - You will not help them and endanger yourself.

All sorrow, Nina and Nata are staying with me. How could they actually help me? It would be not safe to take me to anybody's home.

All of us are weeping.

- Is Asya alive? - Nata asks.

- She is, but she is very sick... She has had seizures since the the German hit her on the head with a whip. - She is feeling bad today... Go away from here... Thank you.

My legs are faltering. It seems to me I have been walking for hours. Asya is sitting on the step of the staircase, her eyes are closed, her face is sad.

It is hard for me to tell her about the horrible news. Asya's mother is in the ghetto. Her father was killed in a roundup on one of the first days. Her parents had been lawyers highly respected in the city.

I tell everybody the frightening news. Maybe people will run away to look for a safe place. But where could they run? Perhaps some of them will hide themselves in their friends' homes?

Weeping and wailing around...

I come up to Edith and Linda.

- In Ghetto eine Aktion,* - I say.

- Aber in Sonderghetto dasselbe?** - Linda asks.

I look pleadingly at Edith:

- Man muB Otto sagen. Ins ghetto darf man nicht gehen. Alle werden erschossen...***

To tell Otto? What can he do, especially now when Leyman is back from Germany?

Edith is silent...

I am not worried about myself any more. All my thoughts are about mother and Inna. I try to imagine how they creep into the cellar, frightened and weary. Maybe they are dead? Maybe they were killed or are being killed at this very moment?!

Time seems to stop. How late is it now? I dare not to ask: perhaps the working day is over and right now we shall be moved there, to the ghetto?

Nobody is trying to flee to the city. How can anyone make it without a passport?

Edith informs me that Lehman has not yet returned from Germany. Can we really hope? What can Otto do?

At 5 o'clock Otto announces that the column will not go to the ghetto...

In the evening he brought us bread.

...We spend night in the cellar.

x x

x

Morning of the 3rd of March. As usually, we are hauling wheelbarrows. What happened to mother and Inna? Perhaps, they are dead? Asya has seizures again. Otto exempted her from work. She is sitting on the stairs and maybe thinking about her mother...

I am hauling wheelbarrow together with Yulya Garfinkel. Both her parents were killed.

We are so terribly tired, barely drag our feet.

Otto often talks to Edith. God bless him. He put himself at risk by not letting our group to the ghetto, and thus saving our lives.

* - There is pogrom in the ghetto.

** - Is there one in the sonderghetto also?

*** - It is necessary to tell Otto. One must not go to the ghetto
Everybody will be killed...

How is he going to account for this if asked. Let them believe his explanations!

Something is wrong with him today. He is nervous: either we put something on or carry to the wrong place. We understand: he is in a bad mood.

At the end of the working day Otto sets the column and we are headed for the ghetto.

...There are puddles of blood on the snow all around - the traces of the recent pogrom.

People are running to us. Inna and some woman are hurrying to me. Oh, God! I can hardly recognize mother. Alive! But she is really unrecognizable! Yellowish-blue skin, dusty-colored hair, a very loose coat. Now I see how haggard she is - that is why the coat became so big and is hanging loosely.

- Alive, alive, my dear, - I am crying happily.

I notice Otto.

- Mom, Otto saved our lives...

We follow him with our eyes. He, Edith and Linda are heading for the sonderghetto. I ask mother, if there was a pogrom there.

- No, - she says. - Nobody has touched them yet.

Yulya also hugs her mother. Where is Asya? Is her mother alive?

- I was looking for her, could not find. Everybody who is alive is here, - mother says.

We run to the Obuvnaya street, to Asya. Her door is open, she is sitting on the bed, ashen and stiff.

Now Asya is all alone...

x x
x

Everybody who was hiding in the cellar is alive.

Mother recounts:

- Panic has erupted in the morning. The labor columns were held up. We understood that your column had gotten outside the ghetto earlier. Then shooting began. The ghetto was encircled. We managed to tumble into the cellar. Innochka huddled to me, trembling all the time. Feet, arms, back were numb. I was thinking about you, father, grandma... And then, - mother broke off...

- They were shooting into our cellar, - our neighbor, doctor Gita Efimovna continues, squeezing her temples. -- And they were firing and firing.

- Did they find an entrance to the cellar?

- Yes, they did, but they did not come down, they were firing from the stairs. We all huddled in the far corner. Then we heard: "No, there is nobody in there. See, nobody is screaming... They would have been frightened... Where could they have hidden themselves? Maybe on the hill? I wish we could blast this dregs!"

- I thought they would throw a shell, - Gila Efimovna added, - I was eager to run out and do something to these beasts. But I thought I might endanger the whole assembly...

How beautiful Gila Efimovna is! Tall, slender, with radiant blue eyes and chestnut hair.

- Do you know, - mother says suddenly, - Yesterday was my birthday.

- So, - I hug mother, - yesterday was our victory - we remained alive...

"I Want to Paint your Portrait..."

No, one, can never get used to this! One cannot look into blank eyes of Sarachka Levina. Only several days ago her husband and daughter were alive. They were killed during the 2nd of March pogrom. Alechka was killed in the ghetto, Levin while working in the city. It was said he died the heroic death. There is a word that some German wanted to single him out from other victims as a facharbeiter-specialist (Levin is an artist, and worked as a wall-painter). But he stayed with his comrades. Together they assailed the Germans.

It is believed he had connections with the underground...

...I cannot forget his face, so handsome and so intelligent.

Just recently I remember when Asya, Yulya and I were in the column together. Asya said:

- Listen, have we not forgotten?

- Z-pod pushchei Polessya

- Z-pod Nemana, Sozha... *

I caught on, in heavenly spirit:

- Z-pod Puschi, Dnepra i Zakhodnei Dvini... **

Somebody touched my elbow:

- I want to paint your portrait, girl... I'll certainly do this. Just the way you look now...

This was Boris Levin, an artist, a handsome man, a remarkable personality.

There were various accounts about how he died, but I remembered this one.

Candies and Bullets

After the 2nd of March, I dread to approach the Judenrat. Very close to it, on the Ratomskaya street, the Germans shot all the people, whom they had pulled out of their hidings, as well as all the labor columns who had not got outside the ghetto. One of the most heinous crimes was also committed there: shooting of the children from the orphanage.

It was said that just before this villainy one of the fascists had been in the ghetto and treated the little victims with candies.

The gestapo men threw children into the pit alive and threw dirt on them. The earth was moving and moaning, and one can

* The Byelorussian song: "From the forests of Polessye, from Neman and Sozh..."

** "From Dnepr and Western Dvina..."

neither imagine, nor comprehend this. The moaning seems to be still in the air when I approach the Judenrat.

...The rest of the 2nd of March victims had been taken to and shot in Koidanovo.

From Lyalya Brook's Diary

"...We are starving terribly. We suffer even more from cold. We live now in the hospital, just in the ward where mother used to work. Scarlet-fever patients were here. Then the hospital was full of typhoid patients.

Mother fell ill on the 26th of March. After several days, I became sick too. Both of us had bad spotted fever. I survived, only lost a lot of weight.

Then another misfortune. On the 16th of March our father was killed. Our dear, loving, caring father...

... I'll never forget how patients in the hospital received parcels with food, while we had nobody to bring them. And all of a sudden one day:

- Brook! A loaf of bread and three lumps of sugar.

There was also a note from Yashka Cherni, my school mate. He brought me food parcels twice. Thank you, my dear friend...

When father was alive he secretly visited Tolik. It turned out that Tolik stayed not with Lena Sokolova, but with another neighbor - Galya Tumilovich unfamiliar to us before... She lives with the husband but has no children, that is why she wanted Tolik to be with her.

...In the hospital we received a letter from her and were staying in contact. Her husband is a driver. When we were discharged from the hospital, they handed over some food to us. This was very helpful"

From Berta Moiseevna Bruk's Notes

"... The villains broke into our hospital and killed all the patients from Ward 31, among them my husband. That is how Zhenya's life ended. He had been expecting any day the papers to flee the city and join underground.

... I had not known that I had lost forever my life companion, that Lyalinka had lost her father. A giver and a caretaker. That was kept a secret from me. But I heard Lyalinka crying, she was lying beside me in bed.

When I felt a little bit stronger and started to get up, Lyalinka had told me the truth. But at that time I was not even able to cry, to have a feel of what was going on - I was just lying in bed, swollen from hunger...

Tasya, Galya Tumilovich's sister who took Tolyushka to her after the first pogrom (his father is Russian - Vladimir Ivanovich) sneaked to us in the hospital.

...Tasya brought few beets, potatoes and a piece of bread. Since that time she had not shun us and tried to do what she could."

Together

In a column we pass the prison on the Volodarski street. There are people in it who struggled against the fascists. Who are they? Maybe, I know some of them? In my thoughts I tell the prisoners how grateful I am. I know what is awaiting them, and my heart is trembling in sorrow.

We often think of the ways to find a liaison to the underground and partisans. Several times mother and I ripped off our strips and roamed the city hoping to see the acquaintances.

Since Leyman was back it has become dangerous to leave work.

Today Asya and Yulya are not with me. Asya has severe cold, Yulya is coughing with blood. All this is the result of bad weather and always wet feet. The girls did not report to work today...

What can we think of? What is the way out? Maybe there is an underground within the ghetto itself? Where are the links?

We have so many familiar people in the city. Why don't we meet anybody? It is not likely, however, that people give anything away. But still, maybe, we manage to find some connections?

Suddenly I meet a girl on the corner of the Uritski street. She is moving toward me.

- Nina! - I recognize my friend Nina Lipnitskaya with whom I had been in the pioneer camp in Talka.

- I have long been looking for you, - Nina whispers as she is walking beside me.

I am glad it is Otto who is overseeing us today. He will probably pretend not to notice anything. And Nina continues to walk beside me.

- Are your mother and sister alive? - she asks.

- Yes, so far ... What about you?

- Don't ask... Maybe I'll be able to help you... I'll try to obtain a passport for you. With it you'll be able to get out of ghetto...

- What about mother and sister?

Nina is shrugging the shoulders.

She gives me the parcel.

- Here is bread, a little fat.

I look at my dear friend with love and infinite sadness. I fear I see her for the last time. In my situation every meeting can be the last one.

As we are approaching the ghetto gates, it is becoming dangerous to talk here.

- Ninok, - I whisper barely perceptible, - How wonderful it is that we are together. Thank you. Good-bye!

Nina is leaning to me and whispers:

- Good-bye. I'll try to help you.

She is moving off from our column. She is gone from sight behind the crowd.

I remember the pioneer camp in Talka. There we took part in amateur performances. We sang together: "We were marching durch storming cannonade, we were looking into the death's eyes..."

Now we do look into the death's eyes. Together, against all odds.

Potatoes, Bread, Medical Supplies...

Now we have food to subsist on for some more time. Mother went to Efim Abramovich Davidovski who used to be her patient. He lives in the Ratamskaya street. His house did not burn down, and he is bartering some clothes for food.

Efim Abramovich was happy to see mother. He shared with her everything he had. Mother brought real treasure from him: bread, flour, potatoes! He also gave her some medical supplies from what he had at home. People often come to us asking for help. How can mother help without medications? Now we have them. Mother also brought gematogen from the Davidovkis'. It was a real treat - just like chocolate!

Rafalak

Again we saw Mirka Mirkman from the Judenrat.

- How are you doing? - asks Rafalak Novodvoretz, the teaser, a college student before the war.

We know that she is attracted to this handsome boy with gypsy eyes.

- Very good, - Mirka laughs.

- What are you doing?

- Work as a militia-woman, - Mirka replies, and it is not clear whether she says this seriously, or jokingly. - Did you see a militia-woman before the war? You didn't? You can see now.

- Where is your husband working?

- My husband? Solve the puzzle! The hands are dirty, but with food...

- Are your hands clean?

At first Mirka cannot guess what it is about. Laughingly she stretches forward her hands. Well, clean, you may see. Then she understands the point:

- How dare you? Get away, to the column! And get out of my sight...

"Say: I am Kostya Damyanov..."

Ruta might have made this decision a long time ago. Her neighbor Sheva Ozer says that the day before Ruta was carefully ironing children's sailor suit. Sheva wondered why.

The house in which Ruta had lived before the war had not been burnt, and she took with her to the ghetto some documents and clothes. And this sailor suit too. In the evening she had the boy try this suit several times and made some alterations, since it was loose. The she made him repeat many times:

- You have to say: I am Kostya Damyanov. My father is a Bulgarian...

In the morning Ruta put the suit on the boy and came with him up to the wire.

Sheva was standing not far from there, and heard and saw everything.

When the patrol had passed by, Ruta made a hole in the wire, and let the boy out.

- Stand here, son, do not walk far.

Then she waited for the policeman to turn back and approach them. Ruta even called him:

- Come here!

The policeman was surprised:

- How come? Why is he here?

- Listen to me, please. His father is a Bulgarian. Look, his name is Konstantin Damyanov. Here is his birth certificate, - Ruta put the document through the wire.

The policeman turned the document, grinned and asked the boy:

- So who are you?

- I am Kostya Damyanov... Father is a Bulgarian, - the frightened boy mumbled.

- See how he swotted! How old is he?

- Six, he is six. It is written there. - Ruta looked imploringly at the policeman.

- And what is your name?

- Rut Stolyarskaya. Ruta.

The policeman jerked.

- The name you have!.. And where is his father, the Bulgarian?

- In Igarka.

- Exiled? - the policeman sneered.

- No. The day before the war he had gone on a business trip.

- What do you want? Say quicker. I've been here with you long enough.

- Take the boy to the city. To the foster home. Save the child. I have something for you. Ruta took off the ring. - Golden, wedding.

The policeman snatched the ring, looked around.

- What else do you have?

- Nothing...

It occurred to the boy what was going on.

- Mom, I won't go with him!

- Go, Kostya, go, my son.

The policeman shoved him from the wire with the butt:

- Let us go.

- Ruta suddenly became scared.

- You won't kill him? Won't kill?

She crawled out from the hole in the wire and followed them.

From the corner the German and policemen emerged. One of them raised the gun...

Ruta staggered and fell down, her arms stretched forward.

Noemi

When she is passing by both men and women follow her with their eyes. Fabulous beauty!

- She has the face of Sulamif from the bible, - the teacher Lev Avramovich Mirski once said. - And, in general, despite the war, our girls are blossoming.

The name of our Sulamif is Noemi. The name seems to have a melody that suits her very much. She has dark bright face, wavy dark-red hair, and tall, light figure.

We became familiar with Noemi as we settled here, in the Slobodski lane, after the 20th of November pogrom. She lives close to us, on the Kollektornaya street.

Lev Avramovich meant it when he said that the girls were blossoming. But Sheva Ozer, Noemi's neighbor, says that their beauty will lead to trouble. She advises the girls to put on kerchiefs on their heads, stoop, and not raise their eyes. They have to hide themselves from the Germans to avoid their advances.

Anyway, they did not overlook Noemi...

... Now we are cleaning the barrack where German railway workers live. It is located on the Moskovskaya street near the Zapadni bridge. When I say we I mean Asya, Noemi and I. We are in one column with those who work on the construction in the Sverdlov street. And from there a German from the railway takes the three of us to clean the barrack.

There are also two Byelorussian girls working with us: Tanya and Lyuda. Amazingly, the Germans don't forbid us to talk with them. At first, we avoided contacts. Tanya and Lyuda also feared to speak to us. By degrees, we approached each other, and borrowed pails, rags, even shared food.

Once the German supervisor herr Mints entered the barrack. He was long staring at Noemi, with a sullen look. In several days he came again and took her with him. He made her his cleaning maid. It is not safe for her. Several times he held her up, and sent her back home not with our column.

x x

x

Some incredible happenings around Noemi. She again did not come home in our column. Mother was worried and went to her home in the Kollektornaya street. There was a policeman in her room...

x x
 x

What Noemi told me shook me up. That was the first woman's secret confided in me. It turned out that the policeman whom mother had seen her with was not a policeman at all. That was Noemi's schoolmate Slava Rakitski. They have long been in love with each other. He is thinking of a chance to rescue Noemi. He has obtained a policeman's uniform for this.

Now he is very anxious about her. And not without foundations. Normally he would wait for Noemi in the Respublikianskaya street when the column is headed for the ghetto. Their eyes would meet for a moment, and they feel relieved. Now this situation with Mintz, which she has not had a chance to tell him about. That is why when he had not meet Noemi with the column he went to see her at home.

Noemi asked Slava not to risk his life. But he tried to reassure her that soon he would get her a passport and they both would leave Minsk. Nobody asks where they will go. It is clear: either to partisans or to look for them...

x x
 x

An appalling tragedy! I witnessed myself that last meeting of Noemi and Slava.

Our column was coming home from work.

We were approaching the gates with the signs on it that always sting: "Eintritt verboten! Zutritt verboten!" *

Suddenly Noemi seized my hand and whispered:

- Slava is over there!

Wedging his way through the column he came up to us and passed something over to Noemi. They rounded him up immediately. At that very moment a policeman dashed to Noemi, snatched the parcel from her hands and brandished something over his head.

- Passport, - shouted he, - passport!

Slava did everything he could to save Noemi. But they might have been watching him out...

Now they go together: Noemi and Slava. Into the jail or right to execution?

Strong declination

Getting beyond the wire is a lot of risk and fear each time.

I am going home from the Gurskis'... They are such wonderful people. It turned out that through all this time they had been trying various ways to learn about us. I go from them provided with food and with warmth of their hearts.

* Entrance forbidden!

Humiliating yellow strips are hidden under the arms. I am looking around and see on the corner of the Uritski and Internatsionalnaya streets two Germans. That is my end... They approached me and I hear the question:

- Wo liegt das Theater?

- Theater? Dort! *- I point out to it and explain in German how they can get there. I notice malicious glare in the eyes of one of them. He is asking where I know German from, maybe I am a Jew?

- Nein! Nein! Ich bin keine Judin! In der Schule haben wir gut Deutsch gelernt. Ich erinnere mich sogar an manche grammatische Regeln. ...Futurm bildet man... Zu der starken Deklination gehoert... **

I blurt out grammar rules that our teacher Vera Alexandrovna taught us so well. The Germans are amazed:

-Unwarscheinlich! Sie hatten eine ausgezeichnete Lehrerin...***
...Thank you, Vera Alexandrovna!

Exempted from Wearing Yellow Strips

Otto treats Anya Botvinnik very well. Anya is a teacher. Reddish hair, gorgeous white-pink complexion, gray eyes, calm and composed. In good old prewar time Anya taught mathematics and German. For Otto and us Anya acts as a translator.

Anya had got familiar with Otto before we did. He was accepting the labor column and asked who knew German. Anya would not want to admit this. But other women gave her away. Otto had spoken with her and was very surprised:

- Your parents might have been wealthy people and could teach you foreign languages.

- No, my parents were ordinary working people. The state taught us, free of charge. And then I became a teacher myself.

Otto treats her with respect. Brings coffee to her. Once he saw her quickly sewing her yellow strip (she had just been to the city). He said:

- You may come to work without them. Sew them later when you go to the ghetto.

Otto is a remarkable man! No doubt.

We learnt from Anya that his last name was Shmit, that he was a construction engineer, and that he hates Adamski and Leyman - bosses of the firm "Gotse-Leyman" for whom we work so hard.

* - Where is the theater?

- Over there

** - No, no! I am not a Jew. We studied German at school very well. I even remember grammar rules. The future is formed... To strong declination pertain...

***- Incredible! You had an excellent teacher!

Poor Hanka

Poor Hanka... A broken spirit... She is only sixteen years old... This beast has long kept an eye on her. No wonder he was attracted to her. Her braids alone were worth looking at. Long and black... And she herself is like a fluttering bird. Trusting blue eyes, dimple on the chin.

What a savage! He forced her...

He used his power of order protection service. The ghetto policeman! The same scamp as those outside the wire.

He deceived Hanka by saying he could warn her about the roundup in the Zelyonaya street where she lived, and hide her in the Judenrat. But for this she has to come to him... Just to come and talk...

And Hanka believed him. She came at the agreed-upon hour...

Ingrid

- Run away, they seize girls and boys! -- mother shouts and pushes me into the opposite side. I am running but over there I also see a procession of approaching green uniforms.

On the left there are houses and courtyards of the Obuvni Lane. On the right - the barbed wire of the sonderghetto where Jews brought by fascists from overseas live...

I already here German commands and people's screams.

That is it! A trap! No way out!

- Maedchen, Maedchen!* - I suddenly hear the voice from the sonderghetto. I turn around and see a girl near the wire.

- Hier, schneller! ** - she whispers and makes an opening in the wire.

I run into the sonderghetto territory. I stop there as if there is no danger any more, look out for mother. She was nowhere to be seen.

- Schneller, schneller, komm ins Haus, ***- the girl pulls me by the hand and we hurry into the house.

I could barely recover my breath. Worried, I dash to the window: "Maybe, this is the pogrom again?"

-- Mutti, Vater, dieses Madchen ist aus einem Ghetto. ****

Unfamiliar people are looking at me. Then they ask something I don't understand. I breathe heavily and fitfully.

A woman gives me the armchair and brings a glass of water.

Exhausted I fall into the armchair, looking around. It immediately comes to my mind that the former tenants of this house might have been killed and these ones might have only recently moved in. A wardrobe, a dresser, a high leather sofa. Such kind of furniture had been almost in each house before the war. But what is attracting my attention? Suitcases! Foreign-made. There are four of

* - Girl, girl!

** - Come here, faster!

*** - Quicker, quicker into the house.

****- Mom, Dad, this is the girl from that ghetto,

them, standing one upon another. And there is some surprising thing on the table, either a box or a case with mosaic inscriptions. I cannot take my eyes off it. The girl might have noticed that. She opens it. The sounds of the Turkey march overwhelm me.

- Mozart... Mozart... - I whisper. My hosts laughed reticently.

Oh! These are the parents of the girl who saved me! Tall, skinny father and small slender mother.

Mozart... Kind eyes... An entirely different world... But I realize soon: this is just the remainder of the prewar world.

The mesmerizing music stops.

- Danke, danke,* - I say and head for the door.

- Nein, nein... I sehe nach,** - the woman says. But the girl runs ahead of her.

- Ingrid! Ingrid!

That is my savior's name. It is so beautiful!

Ingrid comes back soon. Her face is pale and scared. She is telling something to her parents. I am trying to understand: near the wire the killed boys are lying.

- Mit Flicker?*** - I ask (If with strips it means they are from our ghetto)

Ingrid nods.

I understand that to have me here may be dangerous for the hosts. I am heading for the door again. The girl's father stops me. I notice how exhausted his yellow face is. Suddenly he is all shaking from cough. There is blood on the handkerchief which he put to his mouth. He turns away and hurriedly hides handkerchief in the pocket.

... How many hours have I been here? How are mother and Inna doing? When the man left the house it seemed to me that he was absent for hours. At last he came back and told me I could go.

- Danke, danke, - I whisper and run to the wire. Ingrid lets me out through the opening.

I am running to our home to the Slobodskaya, my thinking muddled: Where are mother and Inna? Have they captured my friends Bronya and Lenchka Goldman? Who are my saviors from the sondetrghetto? Where are they from? How sick Ingrid's father is... This must be tuberculosis. Is he going to die?

It seems in the ghetto nobody so far has died from natural causes...

The Night Pogrom

March 31st, 1942.

Shooting wakes us up. It is heard somewhere very close to us. Until now there were no night pogroms. What does this mean?

- Partisans, - Khaim Pulman rushes to the door.-- I am going with them!

We can hardly realize what is going on... Khaim snatches the iron breaker and runs out. Immediately we hear shooting. We

* - Thank you, thank you.

** - No, no! I'll go and see.

*** - With strips?

understand: Khaim is dead, this all means either a pogrom or a roundup.

We all huddle in a small room. We block the door with the wardrobe, look through the window once in a while and hold our breath.

...The voices of the Germans and policemen are heard somewhere near. We move a little bit from the window, to see the yard. My God! How frightful! In the light of the moon and street lanterns we see that from the house opposite us (it belongs to the Kollektornaya street) people are pulled out. Women are carrying children. Somebody is being dragged over the ground. People are shoved with the butts to the wall. The commands are heard clearly:

- Zum Wand! Von Wand! *

Alternately people either face the wall or turn around.

- Schneller! Schneller! **

People turn fast like clock-work. Cannot do it any longer, fall down...

- Stehen! ***

Everybody stops.

Where can we hide ourselves not to hear screaming and wailing from the street?

We hear shooting. In horror, I cling to mother, Inna. Everything is blurring, legs become numb...

We hear some distant rumbling. No, it is not distant. Somebody is pounding on our door. We clearly hear the conversation:

- We might have not been here.

- No, we have not!... But where are they? Maybe Sofronov drove them out? Go down into the cellar.

We all hold our breath. We fear that little Pavlik is here. Mother clutched him to her breast, so that he may not cry.

The policeman might have been in the cellar because we hear:

- It is empty. Nobody is there.

They are already at the wardrobe that is hiding us. They open it, rummage through the clothes.

- Take this for your Raisa...

- Mmmm, it is too big... I'd better take this. Why are you not taking anything?

- My folks would not wear the Yids' clothes.

They go away. And suddenly shooting. Into the wardrobe. There are things that have no explanation: we all hushed. Even Pavlik did not cry.

The policemen left. But we do not leave our hiding. The day is breaking.

Out there in the street, near the wall, the dead are lying. We see several Jews from the Sonderghetto. We recognize them by a different clothing. One of them has a yellow star on the chest - Mogen David - Judaism mark. The Germans, probably, make the Jews

* - To the wall! From the wall!

** - Quicker, quicker!

*** - Freeze!

from the Zonderghetto wear these yellow stars just as they make us wear yellow strips.

Here are the Germans and policemen. We hear them talking. Maybe this is their burial squad? The Germans want their countrymen-Jews be grave-diggers. They make them bury the dead from our ghetto. They will, perhaps, carry them to the burial ground... What is this? The killed are being stacked.

The one with a yellow star steps aside. He is very close to our window. Nauseous, he is shaking his hands, crying. The policeman pushes him with the butt to the stacks of the corpses, makes him carry them.

What a nightmare!...

x x
 x

There is an array of night pogroms in the ghetto. One of them was in our neighborhood, in our Slobodski lane.

Nights became as scary as days.

Streams of Blood

Mara Entina was taken into the hospital for infectious diseases in a serious condition. The temperature was over 40, she had fever. Diagnosis: typhus. But she recovered.

She was very weak, could not move. Near her an infant was lying. The patients used to say in a kind of sad humor:

- Who will stand on the feet faster, Mara? You or the little one?

The horrible news about the night pogrom in the Slobodski came quickly to the hospital. There, on the Slobodki lane, Betti Yakovlevna Stolina, was living. She was for Mara like her own mother. Mara was forbidden to get from bed but she took canes, and leaning on them came up to the Slobodski. She saw bloody streams on the snow and stacks of the dead. The house where Stolina lived had not been touched yet. Mara began looking for Betti Yakovlevna. But she did not find anybody in the apartment. The girl realized that people were hiding themselves in the cellar. She cried:

- Come out! Come out!

As people began coming out from their shelter, Mara saw the totally exhausted and stone-stiff Betti Yakovlevna.

When He Came Home

On that day the Tyomkins family were happy. Senya brought home a piece of fat and eggs. And, in general, lately, the boy has been managing to sneak to the city. He grew up so fast, and became so daring and reckless! He has gray sparkling eyes and there is such firmness in them.

... They were happy that day. But at night...

Senya's house is near the wire. Sleeping is wary in the ghetto,

every sound is heeded. Senya was the first to notice the Germans who surrounded the house.

- Hide yourselves! Run away!- he cried.

Senya broke the window and jumped into the Shornaya, outside the wire.

When he returned home he found only his mother. She hid herself under the bed, and being undiscovered survived. Everybody in the house was killed. Senya's sister Rivochka was found on the Obuvnaya street. She attempted to flee, and they stabbed her with bayonets.

Spotted Fever

There was an epidemic of spotted fever in the ghetto and mother went to the hospital for infectious diseases to help fight with it.

Her specialty is neurology, but in the ghetto she is a general practitioner, pediatrician, traumatologist... and a laborer, too.

Only now mother told me about the epidemic. It would be scary if the fascists knew about it. They would destroy the entire ghetto. Doctors and all the staff kept silence. They pretended that in the hospital for infectious diseases non-infectious ones were treated.

Yet...

I walk along the wire in the hope to see my savior Ingrid. Maybe she or here parents would come here? I often think about them. The music-box... Mozart... Their courage... That I am alive I owe to them...

When I see Ingrid I'll hand over to her the German textbook for seven graders. I found it in one apartment in the Slobodski lane. Some child might have used it before the war.

I often go to the wire but don't see Ingrid. They haven't yet rounded up and shot the Jews brought over here from Germany. They form burial squads from them and make them stack and bury the dead. This is the job they are forced to do. But nobody has been killed... Yet...

Murder To Music

One more product of the sadistic fantasy - on the square, near, the Judenrat, there are sounds of music. People assemble for appell - this German word, which means "roll call", is known to everybody in the ghetto. At this time the decrees are read and speeches are delivered. But sometimes people are herded in the square, in order to be shot, just so, to the sounds of music. Asya and I go no longer in the mornings to the judenrat where people assemble for a roll call before the work. We join the column on its way, in the Republikanskaya. This is very scary, we risk our lives. But appells with music are even more frightening.

Beasts

People pour out their wrath on those scoundrels from the Judenrat and the ghetto police: Rosenblatt, Epshtein, Vainshtein,

Segalovich, Tulski, Rishilevski, Rosenblat and Epshtein from Poland.

Many of those who are forced to work in the Judenrat hate these bandits too. We noticed that they sometimes canceled the orders of the Germans' bootlickers while dispatching people to work. It was obvious that the traitors were hated and despised by everybody.

Tsores

Again and again I am at the wire of the sonderghetto looking for Ingrid. In the meantime, something unbelievable is going on. I don't believe my own eyes. Some woman penetrated into the ghetto and bartered food for clothes.

- Do you have anything to sell, girl - the woman is asking in the mixture of Russian and German.

- Tsores, - I hear the familiar voice.

"Tsores" means "sorrow" in Yidish. An incredible answer!

I look around and see Ingrid. Light-auburn hair, warm expression of the eyes.

- Ingrid! Ingrid, - I cry and pass out the textbook to her.

One mustn't stay long at the wire. I tell Ingrid my name and we agree to meet here tomorrow when I come back from work.

x x
 x

Ingrid's father has died.

So, Ingrid told the truth: all she can sell was sorrow.

Her father was a teacher. When the Jews in Frankfurt-on-Mein were ordered to leave the city he had gone to say good-bye to the school he had used to work. Only to the school, not to the people. His students, German boys, came up to him. At that very moment the soldiers from the special unit started to beat him.

I recall the last meeting of Ella's mother, Bela Moiseevna, with her students.

To Walk on the Sidewalk - Forbidden!

Mateika Shuster was killed for walking on the sidewalk. Just for this... They call it "shooting for non-compliance". Everything is banned in the ghetto: to buy food, to speak loudly, to go along the sidewalk...

The Germans yell about this ever more often during their appells...

... Mateiko Shuster was a mathematician, a chess-player, a bright man.

The Red Star

Again I meet with Ingrid. We are standing at the wire among other people and, for some, reason, she is pulling me aside. Then she squeezes her hand through the wire. On her palm I see the five-point red star! Where did she take it from? Ingrid is telling me: from her father. And she did not know where he had taken it. Maybe he was a communist? She shrugs her shoulders when I ask her this question. A Thelman follower? Yes, he liked Thelman.. So, he liked him..

I feel on my palm the warmth of a red star that the girl from Frankfurt-on-the Main shares with me.

We have Never Seen that...

We have never seen that...

Otto sent Anya Botvinnik on an errand to the office with some paper. He ordered her to take off the strips and explained the directions:

- Das liegt an einer Ecke. Da has du Ausweis.*

...Unafraid and confident, Anya is walking along the Savetskaya. Suddenly she heard somebody yelling:

- Where are you going?! I have seen you many times in the column...

Policeman! Any tries to explain that she ran an errand, had to bring the paper to the office.

- You are lying! It is impossible! I'll take you to jail!

Anya answered:

- Ask the German - he dispatched me.

- OK, I have half an hour. Let us go!...

The policeman brought Anya to the Sverdlov street. People are running to Otto.

- Was ist los, Annhen? **- Otto asks.

Any told the story.

We don't believe our eyes: Otto slapped the policeman in the face! The policeman asked to forgive him. But Otto points out to Anya:

- Bitte sie um Verzeiung...***

So far we haven't seen such things happening!

Ordinski

Mother was in the city again. We were waiting impatiently for her to come back. She went to see her friends. Unthinkable rumors are passed around. That is the story she heard:

- Professor Ordinski whom she used to work with asked the Germans to allow his Jewish wife to live outside the ghetto.

* - It is on the corner. You have a pass.

** - What has happened, Anya?

*** - Ask her for an apology.

Germans allowed her to do that but on condition that German doctors sterilize her.

Ordinski poisoned himself.

An Italian

A woman is carrying a tub. The tub is big and heavy and she is wobbling. A military man is catching up with her. He is getting closer and closer to her. Gripped by fear, she slows down. When soldier caught up with her, he took her tub. The woman is running away.

The man in an unfamiliar uniform is shouting:

- Ich bin nicks Deutsch.. Ich bin Italiano... Italia - verstehen? *

The woman stops and calms down. The Italian helps her to carry the tub.

Why are Italians in Minsk? We have not seen them before. There were Hungarians, and it seems, Rumanians. And now Italians. But they behave themselves in a decent way.

Bedi-Greta

So far I have not seen any German women in the ghetto. Now one of them picks up laborers from the column for her own use.

- Du, - she pokes her finger into my chest.

We have to part with Asya. I am not going to work in the column supervised by Otto. We are very grateful to him for everything he has done for us.

This fat, red-haired woman-boss, what is she like? It seems this unexpected change of my life promises nothing good for me...

Frau Bedi-Greta - this is her name. Maybe, the writing is different, but that is how it sounds.

Why did she settle here, in this brick building on the Mebelnaya street? We know nothing about her.

We wash the floor, walls, windows. Move the furniture and huge ficuses, clean sofas, and put carpets.

Who is she, this woman? There is no doubt that even Germans fulfill her orders dutifully.

Maybe she is the wife of some big boss? Maybe she herself is the boss?

Like shadow, she shows up all of a sudden, and her voice, though a female's one, shrieks like Leyman's. I am happy to have worked there only several days.

Thanks God, I am again in the Otto's column.

Herr Adamski

How bitterly Bronya Goldman was crying! How bitterly!

She was unloading coal at the railway station, and brought a little bit home, to lit an oven.

* - I am not a German... I am Italian... Italy - do you understand?

Just on that very day Adamski did a search and found it. He beat Bronya brutally. A beast, there's no other word for him.

Why has a German such name - Adamski? Maybe he has Polish ancestry? But Germans hate the Polish too!

For some reason he picked up a parlor maid from the ghetto. Many people say she is pretty. But I don't like her. Of course, she is tall and slim. But she has somewhat crane-like gait. She stretches forward her neck. And there is something foxy in her wholesome, with dimples, face.

Word has it that this beast Adamski treats her well. Things do happen...

Goose-foot from the graves

Mother and Inna went to the graves, and picked goose-foot. Mother crushed it and put on the pan to heat. Tasty!

Fima obtained some sacharine. We drank boiled water with it. That was delicious!

Pogrom on the 28th of July

As I am eating hastily pancakes on my way, I am thinking of our daily ration: chopped goose-foot or nettle heated on the pan and pancakes from potato peels.

I am in a hurry. Asya and I decided to join the column on the Respublikanskaya. I make several steps along the Obuvnaya and feel some anxiety. Anxiety turns into alarm and, finally, into fear.

I see people running, their torn clothes are stained with blood.

A woman with a bleeding arm stops, trying to catch her breath.

- What is there? - I dash to her. - Roundup? Pogrom?

- I don't know... They seize people... Shove them into the trucks... I barely escaped...

It means pogrom! I think about mother and Inna? Do they know? Did they manage to hide themselves?

And what about myself? What shall I do? I run into the courtyard. There is no fence there, it may have been taken apart for firewood. I hide myself behind the gates. From the Respublikanskaya street people are running by.

Through the chink in the gate I see Germans and policemen who cut off the way for those people.

I press myself against the gate. If only they see my feet from below it's all over. Maybe they don't see them through the grass?

There is no way out. The house is very close, but it is very quiet there. All people may have hidden themselves.

I hear the barking of the dogs who were incited to attack people.

... The autos honk and honk. Are they pulling off or arriving?

I see the Germans and policemen running along the Obuvnaya, to the right. Creeping through the courtyards, I am running home.

I stumble through the dead, fall down, get up again. I don't remember how I reached home. Remember warm mother's hands. She took Inna down into the hiding and was waiting - maybe I would come home.

In the hiding no faces are seen, no voices are heard. Darkness, cold and fear stiffen us. We cuddle near mother and feel the warmth of her breath.

...The pogrom lasted three days. Three days of darkness and fear.

Malya

Why should this child be born? To die such a horrible death?

What tragic end for Malya Kriger and her infant Lilechka.

During pogrom on July 28th, Malya did not do down into the hiding. She was sitting on the bed with her Lilechka. The girl was born in the ghetto. People used to say that was a good sign. The birth of a girl - the birth of peace.

Malya's sister Dvosya was already in the hiding. Malya's eight-year old son Kim who did not want to go without mother was forced in there. The entry would soon be closed, but Malya was still sitting on the bed clutching the baby. She would not go down being afraid to endanger the assembly if the baby starts to cry.

The old Sendar said:

- This is not good. Take the baby. We'll hide her.

Suddenly the shooting began.

Dvosya who was supposed to close the entry rushed out and pulled the sister with her. Malya did not manage to seize the baby.

...When shooting was over, Malya ran out - to the bed. Her little daughter was choked with a pillow.

Malya took the baby and went out. She was going with the choked girl in her hands, and people looked into her stony face and blind eyes.

Otto saves Anya

On July 28th, our labor column was outside the wire when the pogrom began.

On that day, Anya Botvinik was dispatched to Bedi-Greta, in the Mebelnaya street. Somewhere around noon, the children who managed to escape the pogrom told her what was happening in the ghetto.

Later Anya was telling me:

- All the workers were lined up to be moved to the ghetto. I was looking around for the way to flee... The graves were near the place. One could hide behind some gravestone... But shooting and voices were heard there.

... We were on the Shornaya street, approaching the ghetto. The columns were stopped by the approaching SS men. We heard the words:

"Facharbeither", "Schwartzarbeither".* It meant that "Facharbeither" could hope to be alive. "Schwartzarbeither" had no hope. Our column consisted only of unqualified laborers. Both on the Shornaya and the Republikanskaya the trucks were waiting. The people were herded towards them. I was trembling and crying.

Suddenly we hear Otto's voice. He is explaining to the SS man that I am not a laborer and work for him. I was pushed out from the column to join the "specialists". There are very few people here.

And the people from another column were pushed into the trucks. Those who did not comply were shot.

Petrified from fear, we were standing and waiting. Otto was talking with the German guards and we understood that we would not be shot.

...On the Shornaya - there are dead bodies. They are those who attempted to flee.

We are ordered to carry the dead to the cemetery. I am nauseous. The Shornaya street is drowned in blood...

From Lyalya Brook's diary

"...I and some other girls got a job. What kind of a job was this? We were given the spades to fix the railroad embankment. We were working together with prisoners of war. The job was a drudgery, particularly for one after typhoid fever.

On July 28th we heard the shooting - that was the pogrom in the ghetto. We could not go back. Somehow we managed to talk the guard into not taking us back to the ghetto. He led us into the debris of the building and left. We were sleeping in the garret, hushed up, afraid to be noticed by policemen...

...Three days we have not been at home, and I was afraid that I lost my mother... On the fourth day, when we came back home I learned that the the place where we had lived and everything around was in ruins except for the hospital of infectious diseases. That time we had good luck: mother was alive. One can't find words to describe the nightmare..."

Yulya is dead

Asya is alive! During the terrible time of the pogrom she was in the shelter on the Obuvnaya street. But Yulya Gorfinkel, our Yulechka is not among the living any more. She was shot.

I recall: not long ago, when the column was on its way back to the ghetto, somebody called Yulya from the sidewalk. She looked around and saw the woman.

- Manya, - cried Yulya back.

The woman was nodding, wiping the tears, but she was afraid to come closer.

- How is grandma doing? - Yulya shouted.

The woman's face became shadowed, she shook her hand, and

* "Specialist", "Unqualified laborer"

caught up with us.

- All of them were shot, - we heard. - Driven into the the Lekert's collective farm and shot. You don't have grandma any more, kid.

Yulya became ashen-pale.

Later she told that the woman, Manya by name, was from Chaussi. Manya was a friend and a neighbor of Yulya's grandmother - Yulya often spent summer in Chaussi. A lof of Jews worked in the nearby Lekert's collective farm. Perhaps that is why it became the place of the massacre.

... Now Yulya is also dead.

From Lyalya Brook's Diary

"... We were dispatched to work in the brick factory - were loading bricks. I am working together with Salya Babadzyan. Nobody of Salya's relatives remained alive after the pogrom on July 28th. She was alone, had nothing, almost no clothes. I had some dresses that I shard with her.

At the brick factory we worked together with the Byelorussian boys. They drove bricks from furnaces, and we loaded them on the trucks.

When we had a minute we got together and talked. I got acquainted with the boy named Misha. The job was very hard, but for breakfast we received only 200 grams of bread, and for dinner the pot of watery soup. The boys' rations were better, and Misha often gave me the one. We started to plan how to get out of the ghetto. Misha and his friends promised to help us. But it did not work..."

Classmates

What a bitter fate for Mara Entina's classmates.

All those boys had been in one class...

...Sema Marshak.

SS stopped him in the street.

- Why are you without strips?

In no way would Sema agree to wear them, whoever tried to talk him into this. That was how he was defending his dignity.

SS men ordered him to dig a pit.

- Why? - Sema protested.

They were holding a gun on him.

He was dug into the earth alive...

...Dodik Gertsik. Mara said that this name should command respect and admiration. A wonderful, daring boy!

- He trusted me very much, - Mara told. - We have known each other from school! He told me about the war news, about Soviet Information Bureau's reports. Lately Dodik has not been returning to the ghetto. He was staying for the night in the city to listen to Moscow radio.

He was also killed: captured, tortured and hung...

Rescue

Vasili Ivanavich Vasilyev managed to release his wife Frida Abramovna and the daughter Florachka from the ghetto.

Nobody knew where he had been until that time, how he had got the news about his family, and when he had appeared in the ghetto.

I learned from my good friend Fima Osinovski how he had rescued his family. He used to be a student of Frida Abramovna. And he had helped her a lot.

Vasili Ivanovich came to the ghetto: he put on the yellow strips and joined the column that was returning home after work. Then, in the darkness, before the curfew, with the help of Fima and his friend who stood on guard on the other side of the Shornaya street, he handed over his daughter Flora through the hole in the wire.

Vasili Ivanavich himself remained in the ghetto for the night. In the morning, together with Frida Abramovna, he went to the city with the labor column.

Fima knew that he had prepared the necessary documents for Frida Abramovna.

From Lyalya Brook's Diary

"...Galya Tumilovich told mother that she would help us if we had the documents. (Mother has already seen her several times). I started to look for the ways to obtain them.

Soon people brought to me a fake birth certificate which turned out to be of no use (though I am grateful for this anyway). Then mother was given a forged passport.

And now... Galya Tumilovich and her younger sister Tasya, my age, came up to the wire. I dug the pit under it. They helped me to get to the other side. As I was walking in the city, I had a feeling that everybody knows about me... We came to Galya and stayed with her several days. Shortly after that, mother came..."

From the Notes by Berta Moiseevna Brook

"...I remember Lyalinka's words: "Mom, my heart is breaking apart, it is unbearable here. Let us get out of here..."

On some days Lyalinka would come up to the wire where Tasya was waiting for her on the other side... When nobody could see it, Tasya sneaked some food to us. Thanks to them, I was recovering little by little, and started to think how we could get the documents...

They were brought to us. But they expired. It was not safe to use them, but we had braved a decision.

... We agreed about the time. Lyalinka was the first to flee: she dug the pit under the wire and got out. I was following her

with my eyes and was watching out the guard. My heart would almost burst from fear. I don't remember how long I was standing this way. I imagined all the time that Lyalya was held up and tortured.

Days of agony started for me. According to the arrangement, I was supposed to leave the ghetto after I receive a note from Lyalya. But I did not hear from her. And I decided to leave anyway.

...As a doctor, I managed to obtain a pass into the city, to get medical supplies for the hospital. This pass allowed me and two other women to get out of the ghetto.

... My sister Anna went with me to the wire. At the very last moment I told her to wait to hear from me. Previously, we had agreed with Lyalya that we would meet at the Tumilovichs' and I went there..."

Why Don't I See Nina?

Why don't I see Nina Lipnitskaya? If nothing were wrong with her, she would, probably, come up to the column or look from the distance.

So, something has happened. Maybe, she was captured in a roundup? Maybe, she was driven to Germany? Many Byelorussian girls of Nina's age have been transported to Germany! Nina is a slave? I don't allow myself to think about this.

But something is wrong.

Photograph

No picture is required for a birth certificate. But one must have it for a passport. What if Nina Lipnitskaya or somebody else of my friends help us to obtain a passport? I must have my picture taken.

Photo-studio is located in the Myasnikov street, close to the Shornaya where we live now. Just here there is an opening in the wire made previously by Fima Osinovski. He is a funny, near-sighted guy, a little bit clumsy. We are always concerned that these villains may break his glasses. He is disabled without them.

... I decided to risk. Fima is on guard. Hurriedly, I leave the ghetto territory, and cross the Shornaya street. I am trembling, but my feet are moving fast forward. Now I am on the Obuvnaya street. Then - two policemen are approaching me...

I am trying to look careless: and braid my long hair. It's over, I am safe!

Here is the Myasnikov street. There is a line near the photo-studio. I did not expect this. Again I try to look indifferent. Meet other people's eyes, and I try to convince myself that light eyes color will make me safe.

Now my turn. I fix my collar and put my two braids forward. The photographer, a young man with tight lips, is piercing me with his eyes.

- Come on Wednesday for your photo...

... What a joy it is to walk along the sidewalk, and without damned yellow strips.

x x
 x

I could hardly wait till this Wednesday. As we were returning home after work, I leave the column unnoticed in the Myasnikov street, rip off the yellow strips and rush to the photo-studio building. Let it be not closed. But I see people near the door. So, it is open.

I take my picture. all fear and anxiety. I look at the back of the photo and read: "The Yid". I am stone stiff.... So, it did not work. I had been chased...

I sneak to the door, run out into the street. Look around. See nobody... I turn to the Obuvnaya street, run into the courtyard across the factory. A white-haired girl is sitting on the window and looking at me with an interest. I'd have been better off without a witness.

I hide myself in the privy. Through the chink I see a policeman. He asks:

- Has a girl been here?

A female voice says:

- No, we haven't seen anybody.

He curses in German and goes to the street. I am waiting and waiting... At last, leaning to the wall, leave the yard.

It is so difficult to run upwards along the Obuvnaya!

Fire! The bullet whistled just near me. Shout:

- Freeze!

The Shornaya street! The brick building. Near it, the wire is torn all the way to the ground. (Some days ago, the car hit into it). This is just near our house. I do not remember how I ran into this building. I hear whistling and yelling behind me. I clutch the bag with pictures so firmly that it hurts. There are just few steps left.

Hunger

Hunger is a terrible thing. I am hungry all the time, it hurts inside, I stagger from dizziness.

And you think about bread all the time. Awake and in dream - about bread. We chew pieces of paper, scrub chalk from ovens... Sometimes it seems, we are passing out. I do not want mother to notice this... But she sees anyway. She gives me her bread. Inochka also shares with me her ration. Is there hunger in my eyes?

Vita

My friend Vita Rabinovich saves me from hunger. She brings flour, or potatoes. She takes it from her family...

We have been familiar with her not long. She has good looks. Strutters a little bit, but it seems even to suit her. A big heart, and very brave for her age. Her father and elder sister Tsilya were killed. But only pain in her eyes gives away her grief. It seems, this pain will settle in those eyes for ever.

Vita - in Latin means "life". What does the future hold for the girl with such name? How strongly I wish you to survive, Vita!

For the Future

Nina Shneider had been fleeing the Germans since she had been in Warsaw. She was there in the conservatory, in singing class. Somehow she managed to get to Vilno, and then the war drove her to Minsk. She had nowhere to go. Her only wealth was her voice. Fabulous soprano but who would need it in wartime, behind the barbed wire?!

We got acquainted in the column. She was tall and skinny, with dynamic face. Fire-red hair, puffy lips and venturesome look in her eyes. She might be some twenty two years old... Alone, in a foreign land, behind the wire, with nobody to help her. But she does not feel herself helpless. She knows Polish and German. Her Russian was not bad either.

Together we clean the barracks of the Germans from the railway. When they learned that Nina had been in the conservatory, they commanded her to sing. Nina started to sing something in Polish. The Germans stopped her:

- No, not that, - and gave her the tune.

The girl picked it up at first, but then became silent... They made her sing "Horst-Wessel-Lied" - the Nazi's march.

The German commanded her to sing. Nina was silent. Then he took a bucket of water and poured it on the girl.

...In the evening, before, the curfew, I went to Nina, in the Obuvnaya street.

I heard her voice. These were scales.

- Not only does she sing herself. She teaches also the neighbor girl... What for? - the old Blyuma shrugged her shoulders.

But Nina, probably, knows why she is doing that. For the future... How strong she wishes that there is a future...

Trying to Forget about the Horrible

Thank you, Ingrid! Today I am wearing a blue blouse that you have given me. Ridiculous as it may be, but even in those dreadful

conditions one wants to look well. I even style my hair - make rolls on the temples and then braid them. My braids are long and thick, and mother is very nervous as she says that I look nice with this hair style.

In the column, many look at me differently. It was such a nice feeling to be grown up, to put on clean clothes, to have well-disposed people around. And one wants so much to forget about the horror.

I have never been in love yet. I used to like Misha Lubin, then Tolya Berezhkov. Many girls "loved" Misha. Some of them had even written to him a collective love letter, where they told about their love and put their names. Thanks God, I was not among those dupes.

I seriously liked Tolya Berezhkov. He had light hair and blue eyes. That was my ideal of a handsome male. Once I dared to do something very bold. I called Tolya, and when he answered I put the phone on the piano and started to play. Most likely, Tolya did not understand who was sending him this musical message, but I was ashamed to look into his eyes when we met...

I turn back to the earth. That momentary mood and pleasant memories I see as a gift from heaven.

Lina Noi

Noemi Rudnyanskaya, Sofa Sagalchik and Lina Noi might have been the most beautiful girls in the ghetto.

One cannot forget Noemi's bitter fate and tragic end.

Sofa Sagalchik was killed during a pogrom.

Lina Noi...

In whatever words I describe her beauty, I fail. I see clearly her dark pale face, big light eyes, mass of ash-colored hair. She was tall, poised, graceful and dynamic.

Lina had fallen the victim of one of the most heinous Germans' crimes. Once during a roundup, the most beautiful ghetto girls were captured. There had been driven to the Rabi square and locked in the barn. They were crying, screaming, pounding on the door. They knew what was awaiting them.

They spent the night there, and in the morning they were taken to execution.

Senya Temkin saw how it happened. He also saw what everybody else was telling each other in the ghetto. When the girls were approaching the gates of the cemetery, a song was heard. One of the girls started to sing "International". She was shoved and knocked down. This girl was Lina.

Together with other girls, she was dragged to the graves and ordered to undress herself. Lina did not obey. They forcibly ripped off her clothes.

The girls were shot just for being young and beautiful.

"I Continue to Love Him..."

This is something everybody admires...

Mariya Frantsevna again managed to get into the ghetto. She visited Mark Borisovich. He is fifty. An elderly sick man. She is about forty. She is beautiful and brave, remarkably brave. Like, probably, the dekabrists' wives were.

I knew this story from Emma, Mark Borisovich's daughter.

Mark Borisovich was a singer. He was handsome and talented. His wife, Emma's mother, had died before the war. Emma was sure that father would be loyal to her mother's memory forever. She and her father lived a quiet life and got along well with each other. And suddenly this woman, Mariya Frantsevna, entered their life. She was a pianist, often played musical accompaniment for the father at the concerts.

- I hated her then, - Emma recalled. - Father saw this, and that might be the reason why they had not got married. Now I feel ashamed. Just think, how many times she comes here, to save him. But he cannot walk - his legs are swollen.

- If I go with you, I'll put you in trouble, - he says to Mariya Frantsevna, anguish and sadness in his eyes.

- The previous time, - Emma continues, - as I brought Mariya Frantsevna to the cemetery through which she gets into the ghetto, I asked: "Did you really love father? I did not believe you..."

The reply was: "I continue to love him..."

Rings

I thought that Ringmacher is the nickname of Iosif Volfovich. Later I understood, that he was called "Ringmacher" because he was making rings.

It might seem nobody would need rings at such time. But some did need them. Iosif Volfovich barter rings for food to support his wife and a child. He makes them of old spoons and forks.

He put a lot of fantasy and creativity in each ring. But all he might get for it is a piece of bread or a lump of sugar.

Not long ago Iosif Volfovich's rings were needed in the ghetto.

A very handsome boy with gypsy eyes Rafael Novodvoretz and Rima Sadovskaya have decided to get married. Rima's mother was crying when she had learned about this.

- My sweetheart, now, in this time...

- Don't cry, mother, - Rima answered, - whatever life has for us, it'll be for both.

Bolfovich understood this and made the rings...

... I saw these rings. Simple and elegant, neither from gold, nor from silver - just from plain metal... Let them bring Rafalak and Rima the happiness, that the life has for them.

Heimatland

We are not hauling wheelbarrow - we are cleaning up the house after it has been whitewashed, and scrap the oil from the floor. Here, on the Sverdlov street, the Byelorussian girls were dispatched to work. Our hearts warm up. We are not isolated. There still exist trust, humor, friendliness.

The girls are washing the open windows. Suddenly they began to sing. There is too little room for the song here. It is bursting forth from our hearts to freedom. I start my favorite song;

- My country is vast and big...

I hear whistles of the guards from downstairs. Now there is a German coming up to us, ready to take measures.

- Was singt sie?* - he asks the policeman.

I recall the words of this song in German. We learnt it in school. And I sing in German:

Heimatland, kein Feind
Soll dich gefaerden... **

I don't know what might have happened if Otto had not showed up.

...He saved us this time too...

Fima is dead

Don't get together! Don't get together!

Germans don't allow more than three-four people in an assembly at the same time. The fifth one is shot...

This time the fifth one was Fima Osinovski. It seemed there were neither Germans, nor policemen around when he came to see his friends. There had already been four boys in the group. The German showed up suddenly - and we heard a shot.

Fima was kind and brave. He was on guard when we were getting outside the ghetto and coming back. It was him who helped Vasili Ivanovich to get little Flora from the ghetto.

Quintet

On the Shornaya we made close friends with Bronya and Lenochka Goldman. On the Slobodski we did not know each other very well. And here both of our families live in room. They are younger than me. Bronya is more dynamic. Lenochka is thoughtful and delicate. Nice girls.

...We have created a quintet. It consists of Bronya, Lenochka, Vita, Ina and I. Not loudly we are singing Soviet songs. Bronya has a remarkably good memory, she knows almost all popular songs.

Our favorite song is "Comrades, as you go side by side, be staunch as ever..." The tune and the words are wonderful.

* - What is she singing?

** - Motherland, no enemy will bring harm to you...

Unexpected Proposition

Probably, this encounter will decide our destiny...

Asya, Nina and I have long ago noticed this man. Not once we met his steady firm look. Recently he has often been walking along the Sverdlov street, just near the place where we were working.

Quite unexpectedly he came up to us, looked around and started a conversation.

- Girls, the ghetto will soon be destroyed. You must flee.

We were stunned.

- Who are you?

- It does not matter. I can help you.

- How?

- I can lead you from the city.

- Where?

He is silent for a while, he is just looking into our eyes. Then he says:

- I'll take you to the partisans.

- Are you their liaison?

- This is not the kind of a question you should ask...

- Are you going to take all of us out of here?

- No, first you, - he points out to me, - Then others, one by one.

- Why me?

- It is easier to take you out of here. You do not look Jewish.

- But my mother and sister are in the ghetto...

- No, I cannot take everybody...

- My mother is a doctor...

- A doctor? I have to discuss this... I'll come here on Tuesday, at three o'clock... Don't tell anybody about our conversation...

That's it. We are looking at each other quite a while. Then Asya said:

- This is our chance. We should not turn it down...

But who is he, this man? How strong we wish that his promises are true.!

I wish our working day to be over... I just want so much to tell mother about all this...

Let Him Just not Change his Mind...

We cannot talk long enough about that man. We just fear he may change his mind.

Mother says:

- If Inna and I are not able to go, you will go yourself...

It hurts to hear this.

We decide that next Tuesday mother has to join our column and go to the Sverdlov street to work. We have to ask Otto for a permission to do so ahead of time.

In case it works, mother got her bag with medical supplies ready.

We look at our clothes, sew and patch it.

It is cold. There is frost and a lot of snow...

Mother's Passport

We all look at mother's passport.

- Look, - I said, - Let us alter "Rahil" for "Raisa", "Aronovna" for "Adamovna". Thank's God our last name is safe enough. Neither Germans, nor policemen will pick on this. But, the box "nationality" requires a serious alteration... Let us ask Turetski, he will help us.

Turetski is our neighbor. Of course, nobody is going to tell him that we want to flee the ghetto. We can say that we need the passport to go to the city.

You are foolish, - mother smiles bitterly. - If people could leave the ghetto with such forged papers, there would have been nobody here...

I am aware of that.

On Tuesday

He came on Tuesday at the agreed-upon hour. He was wearing a Red Army trench coat. Its collar is seen from under his coat. As if hypnotized I am looking at this collar. I calm down a little bit - the hope for a rescue is lurking. The man in the uniform - that is how I name him from this moment - disappears with mother in the rear of the backyard. Nina, Asya and I work trying to pretend that nothing has happened. At this very moment our fate is being decided.

...Mother comes back. She is shook up.

- What's up? - we are nervous.

- We have to leave... Next Tuesday he promises to take our family out of here. And later - others.

...So, we are the first.

Parting with Ingrid

This has been decided: we are leaving the ghetto. We are not quite sure whether we can trust the man who will take us outside the city. But we are going to risk - the death will be here for us anyway.

Neither Bronya, nor Lenchka, nor Ingrid are aware of our plan.

But Ingrid's intuition is remarkable. I am standing silent near the wire and she asks if I want to say anything to her.

I shake my head. Ingrid asks me to wait a little. She soon comes back and gives me the bag - it is her present.

She seems to know about our plans.

How to Escape

Again and again we discuss our plan. I go with the labor column. Mother could also join it but Inochka... It is forbidden to go outside the ghetto with children. That is why mother and Inna will have to get through the wire.

I was coming up several times to the opening in the wire that Fima Osinovski did. Thanks God, it is there. Again I remember our friend with gratitude. Neither Germans, nor policemen have noticed it so far.

Mother and Inna have to go to the house in the Sverdlov street. There are two options here. Either mother joins the column after she is outside the wire, and Inna will run on the sidewalk (being blond, she will, perhaps, not arise suspicions) or mother will go with her to the city to the agreed-upon place in the Sverdlov street.

Forgive Me My Silence

I am looking at Bronya and Lenochka. I can hardly keep silence and not say:

- We are leaving the ghetto!

Shall I ever see you again, my dear girls?

They might guess what our plans are. It seems I see the question in Bronya's big grey eyes. Lenochka's eyes, wistful and sad, also watch us.

Forgive me, girls, my silence...

The Last Night

This is the last night in the Shornaya, in the ghetto. No sleep. Silently I say good-bye to everybody who stays in the ghetto.

I fear that the Germans may start a pogrom tomorrow morning. And what if mother and Inna do not manage to escape?

Mother does not sleep either turning from side to side. Only Inna breathes calmly...

...Tomorrow we shall leave forever the hated place. And whatever might be awaiting us, we shall never come back here again. We are ready for anything. If there is death, let us meet it with dignity. If life is our lot - let it bring us freedom. Let our hatred towards fascism never dry up, and let this hatred give us the strength to fight it.

We are leaving to join partisans. We are going to ours.

Epilogue

I put period. I did not make up this story, I told just what had been alive in my memory.

A separate book can be written about how we became partisans of the 12th cavalry brigade named after Stalin, the commander of which was Vladimir Andreevich Tihomirov, later hero of the Soviet Union.

Only some people whom I write about in my "...Letters" managed to flee the ghetto.

The man whose name we shall ever remember with gratitude - Otto Shmit - helped Anya Botvinnik to escape. Anya became a partisan.

Sara Levina, Bronya Goldman and Vita Rabinovich had also been in the partisans units.

Lyalya Bruk, whose notes I cite in this book, was shot during the last bombardment of Minsk, after it had already been freed.

...Sometimes I meet people who had been in my memory since those most terrible days of my life. I met Boris Levin while opening the book of poems for children. On the cover I read the name of the author - Ber Sarin. Ber Sarin was the literary name of a poet and an artist Boris Levin. He gave himself the name Sarin because he fell in love with the girl Sarachka.

...Period. But this book has no end for me. Because there is no end to my memory while I breathe, live and work. I may be writing it through my entire life...

Dear Arthur,

I am sorry for the delay in sending you the translation of Anna's book. As I started to edit my first draft, I wanted more and more not to lose anything that the original conveyed. I mean not so much in the wording, though I gave it much thought too, but in its atmosphere, in what Anna and other people felt at that time. Now that I have gone over my translation several times, I still see that there is a way for its improvement. I would have worked at it more, if I didn't know that you wanted to see it as soon as possible. However, I fully understand my responsibility of a translator, and if there will be a chance for its publication, I shall certainly continue the polishing job.

I wish you and your family all the best in the coming year.

Yours,

Ella